JETHRO BACON AND THE WEAKER SEX

BY

F. J. STIMSON

JETHRO BACON
OF SANDWICH

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/weakersex0000ffst

JETHRO BACON
OF SANDWICH

THE WEAKER SEX

By
F. J. STIMSON

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK:::::::::::::::MCMII

COPYRIGHT, 1902, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published, October, 1902

TROW DIRECTORY
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY
NEW YORK

TO

THE EDITORS OF

SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE

AND

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

UNDER WHOSE AUSPICES THESE TWO

STUDIES

OF NEW ENGLAND STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

FIRST APPEARED

THEY ARE NOW

DEDICATED

CONTENTS

JETHRO BACON, OF SANDWICH

PAGE

I. PROLOGUE: THE ROXANA BOG 1
II. CAPTAIN JETHRO BACON 10
III. MRS. HENNERY BEARSE 21
IV. THE MARSHES OF TINTAMARRE 35
V. LIZZIE AMAZEEN 45
VI. JETHRO BACON, JUNIOR 57
VII. THE HOUSE AT SOUTH DENNIS 69
VIII. NORA HOWES 80
IX. THE HEAD OF PAMET 87
X. THE BEACH AT NAUSETT 101
XI. MRS. JETHRO BACON 116
XII. BARBARA 125
XIII. FATHER RYAN 136

THE WEAKER SEX 143

JETHRO BACON, OF SANDWICH

I

PROLOGUE: THE ROXANA BOG

THE autumn afternoon, chill and ruddy, was waning, and the brown cranberry-bog grew richer in purple glow or gloom. Jethro stood watching the long line of pickers, women, children, some old men, that did his work. Westward, the pitch-pine hills lay blurred in afterglow; northward, there was a clearer, colder light, behind the cream-white dunes. From behind them, above all, over and through all sounds, the monotonous murmur of the pickers, and the low croaking of the frogs, was ever the "rote" of the sea.

It was the early days of this culture of the Cape. But the codfish had gone farther, and that life upon the Banks was hard; commerce was waning; moreover, Jethro Bacon, like all Yankees, liked his ease. A man could work, himself, for money, or he could make others work for him. And Jethro, who had been master of a clipper in the China trade at twenty, commander of an army transport in the Civil War at twenty-five, had seen his shipping sacrificed to mills, and now, at forty, had turned his energies — to a cranberry-bog. It is through the versatility of men like him that New England has not become our country's "submerged tenth." His house was in the town behind him, white-painted newly once each year, behind a row of green posts, like a ship's poop-railing; in the garden, some stunted fruit-trees and a diagram in

box. With his surplus dollars, Canton dollars, Arctic, Grand Bank dollars, he had bought land—then valueless land, now cranberry-bearing.

The long line of pickers approached again. Jethro eyed them patiently, yet his piercing eyes were so little seen, between the half-closed lids, wrinkled with so many suns and winds, that a yard away their glance would be unnoticed. At his crows-feet was that curious muscular tremor of those who have passed half their lives, hand on tiller, eyes upon the glint of waves. Under his heavy black moustache he chewed an unlit cigar — the natural Yankee never smokes a pipe.

He watched the long line of pickers. Slowly they approached; some (and they the more dishonest) looking furtively at their master; others never took their eyes from the tangle of vines in

the sand; others were simply too tired to care. Pickers are paid by the pick, but the profit depends on clean picking; it was before the days of machines, and all rakes bruise the berries. The old men seemed most tired; the children only, as a rule, picked with inattention or hurriedly, looking at the sunset as if to guess the hour. But in those days labor did not go by hours, and the frost was near. The women, in sun-bonnets, and print gowns cut loose and yet clinging enough to reveal the shapes they were guiltless of, picked stolidly, with that Chinese lack of interest women still show in work that is not their own. Yet their eyes were downcast enough, except of one alone. Naught could be seen of this woman in the purple foreground, save that against the cold October sunset her face looked pale (it was olive, indeed), and her hair,

which lay in masses, not in strings or curls, was surely black. Occasionally, upon her knees, she would sit erect, and throw the hair backward with her forearm, upon her shoulders. The gesture was a fine one; and it seemed, each moment, as if she looked at Jethro; or, it may only have been, straight ahead. As for him, he seemed to watch them all grimly; the night was already cold, and a frost meant failure. A man in the prime of his years does not like to fail.

She was second in the line, an old man ahead of her. As they reached the end of the field where Jethro Bacon was standing, one by one, they rose painfully, some haltingly, pressing their hands behind their hips, and stood upright.

"Eben Sears, you first." The old man turned timidly to the speaker; as

he did so the black-haired woman slid furtively a quart or so of berries from her basket into his. "Umph, not so bad—not so bad, Eben; not so bad." The voice had in it a curious mixture of gruff good-nature, bottoming an intellectual disappointment. "We old ones can go the young sparks yet, Eben."

"Nor we'm so old yet, eyther, Jethro Bacon," quavered he. He looked at the black-haired woman with a toothless grin; she wondered, one moment, if he knew. But then, she thought, he only meant the cranberries. Jethro turned to her; her basket was now but half full.

"You'll never make a picker. What's your name?" It seemed rather an insult than a question; so she stood silent. The other women drooped less listlessly for the pleasure of it; and one of them muttered, "She picks for fun."

The "aside" was intended to be overheard.

"Enough o' such," shouted Jethro. "Here's your pay—half wages—now go—or stay, till I am through with these." She looked at him defiantly; a strange contrast to the others, her olive pallor, her dark, impenetrable eyes, her carriage, were like some strain of Southern blood; yet she was Cape, all through. She stood there, looking at him, while the others filed before her, and were quickly paid. "Better to-morrow—better to-morrow!" Jethro spoke grumbling. "We'll have a killing frost by Sunday."

Slowly they went away, the women and the men apart; the boys had vanished, whooping, in the scrub of oak.

Jethro waited till the last group disappeared, reappeared, and disappeared finally in the perse-leaved thickets,

wine shadows against the fading sky; waited till the last sound vanished. The woman stood still. The torn dress clung to her like drapery to a statue; a rent at the bosom, where one fold dropped away, showed her full throat, her breast brown as her cheek, seemingly as pulseless. Still her face did not redden; her nature seemed too elemental for a triviality.

Then, as she gazed at him, "Barbara," said the man. He took her wrist and lifted it; the cheap cotton fell back, and his hand followed the rounded arm almost to the shoulder.

He led her away. She had worked through the season for him; he had always known her; though she had been but a baby when he first came back from sea. "Barbara!"

He spoke her name once more. She looked at him, but no one saw

him, as he kissed her, there in the twilight of the purple meadow. They, too, turned, and walked away, his hand around her, and beneath her breast still hot from the labor of the field.

II

CAPTAIN JETHRO BACON

ON the Cape, the women still go to church; and enough of them, on a Sunday some ten years later, were gathered in the small white wooden Baptist meeting-house, which surmounts the sand-hill on the Falmouth Road, partially to fill that conventicle. The snowdrifts (it was midwinter) were heaped against the door by the cutting, steel-cold wind that blew down the bay; so that it was a credit to the religious disposition of the women—or, at least, to their desire for human companionship—that so many came in a day of snow. For, on the Cape, they keep no sleighs, and all—all, at least, except Jethro Bacon's wife (for he was rich, and, the neigh-

bors thought, a little too free-handed with her; she had a sleigh and horse, of antique pattern; she could drive herself) — all the others must have walked.

There was nothing about the gaunt little edifice to indicate its sacred character. It had a belfry, to be sure; a belfry with no bell; but on it was no cross, only a fish for weathercock. The fish is an early Christian emblem, to be sure; but it may be doubted if the builders, had they known it, would have placed it there. So, too, the cock, more common on old English steeples, refers to Peter; but the allusion is now forgotten, and remains an architect's convention. Meanwhile, the fish (despite the codfish in the Boston State House) survives, as a religious emblem, only in the catacombs of Rome. The Greek Christians put a fish on their

tombs, but the Puritans preferred the death's-head.

The old Puritan churches are nearly all gone from the Cape; the Puritans themselves have mostly turned Baptist, or even Methodist; some few Unitarians, or nothing. And even the Baptist meeting-houses have given up, in many towns, the morning hour of worship. With the last decade or two Sunday trains have come, and every hamlet gets its bundle of bulky Sunday newspapers. It is to be supposed the family stay at home to read it, in the morning, and only by four o'clock get leisure for the contemplation of celestial affairs. But, for matter of that, Cape people are scarcely seen out-doors at any hour. You may pass through the villages, at day, that would seem to you deserted (but for the universal fresh paint upon their houses), though each

house will have a litten-window at the night. But there is no visiting. Old people have lived, winter and summer, in their wooden boxes, and hardly (if women) have been seen out-doors for half-a-century, so that an unacquainted neighbor might hear only of their living at all when, at the last, they come to die. Then, the best parlor is opened, and they "view the remains."

Still, some folk—even women-folk—must meet at times; perhaps this gives the name of meeting-house to the churches. Or does the word—"church"—smack also of the Scarlet Woman? At all events, this particular meeting-house was partly full that day; and the women, bonnet-strings untied, were listening to the exhortations of the new minister—a thin young student from a Southern college, clad in rusty black broadcloth and a white tie, who

had come, weak-lunged, to brave his life to Cape Cod breezes.

The inside of the church was equally bare of symbolism. Four white walls, eight windows, and an iron stove, with a long line of pipe bisecting the interior, above the centre-aisle. Cape people like hot rooms; and pews of highest price were near the stove. No evidence of emotional religion was in the edifice. The Cape has strong emotions; but they find, it would appear, no outlet in religion—except, perhaps, in "revivals," at Eastham, in the old camp-meeting days, or now, in spiritualism, at Onset Bay. Human emotion has, by the Orthodox, been ignored since Governor Bradford's time—left to the church he so abhorred, with "ye ceremonies, and servise-booke, and other popish and antichristian stuffs, the plague of England to this day"—but not, he

would appear to have hoped, of New England. And, indeed, "with ceremonies and services" its country-people are not overburdened.

Jethro Bacon was not a member of the church, and hardly in these times lost caste thereby—save, perhaps, with his wife. Yet he was kind enough to her, and, in Cape phrase, "a good provider;" and he drove to the meeting, with her, once a Sunday. But he went not in; even with a certain ostentation, he would not go in; he would come with her just at the end of waiting, when all the other worshippers were clustered around the door; and would rattle away, after his spouse had clumsily got out. Whither he went no one knew; but he would return in time for the end of meeting. You would not have thought them so devoted a couple, but of this duty Jethro never failed, ex-

cept when he was away—but he never was away. His large interests were still on the Cape; and where his treasure was, it seemed, was his heart also. Though he had been a roamer in his youth, and even now would spend a day of each week in Boston, he would go by that long "Cape train," that still resembles nothing so much as an Eastern caravan, which starts with two cars, in some unknown nocturnal hour, at Provincetown, and ends with twenty more variegated ones; starting with the old-style, Provincetown, yellow "monitor-cars," and ending at Taunton with the darker-painted modern "coach," a motley procession (never yet, though, a "Pullman," or other car of extra price; for the Cape people are impatient of such superiorities); and he would return, in like manner, the same afternoon, when the long caravan, of twenty cars,

like a yellow-and-red caterpillar, trundled slowly out of the Old Colony depot, full of babies, and bundles, and Cape women, bonnetless, and, in the smoking-car, the baby-carriages and their shirt-sleeved husbands (shirt-sleeved in summer only, not in winter, though then the cars were hotter still). Jethro would be sitting in the frontmost car, chatting with his neighbors, while the noisy fours played cards—the chat growing more intimate as all the cars behind, by ones and twos, dropped off—never too intimate, though, as is Cape custom, and personal rather about one's neighbors than one's self; for Cape folk are intense individualists, and recognize, every man to his neighbor, the right to lead his life in his own way, not hindered by any comment that shall reach his ears.

The *pièces de résistance* of the meeting-

house mysteries—one can hardly call them services—dragged their length along; the long prayer to the Almighty, full of instruction, full of explanation of his people's souls; the long sermon to the people, full of explanation of the divine intention, full of criticism of the prophets and apostles; the querulous, quavering hymn, unaccompanied by organ, doing sole duty for that element of worship which is praise. No word of all that morning dealt with the conduct of the flock, the sermon was as if they needed no exhortation what to do or what to leave undone; not even the ten commandments had been read—as if they had been conduct-perfect, loving one another. Did not the early Puritan eschew the Ten Commandments as coming from the Book of Common Prayer? All was as if they had been saints on earth, debating the theology

of heaven. All had been addressed to the mental processes alone— But Jethro Bacon was a man of action; small wonder such pasturage filled not his need. Where he spent his Sunday mornings, no one knew or asked—nor did they ask what took him up to Boston. They speculated — as, perhaps, did he.

The doors were flung wide open, and the boys burst out. But not this day, as usual, to scatter in the berry-pastures, or flounder in the snow; they stood surprised upon the steps, until the women-folk, stopping to talk about each other's ailments, saw it, too.

For in front of the steps, standing at the usual place, the "buffalo" half dragging on the ground, was the Bacon horse and sleigh. The horse was quiet, as usual, waiting for the meeting to be over, but the "lines" were broken,

and one was trailing in the snow; the sleigh was empty, and Jethro nowhere to be found. The women clustered and buzzed inarticulate. Soon the whisper crystallized to a murmur, *he has had a stroke—he has had a stroke*. Mrs. Bacon wrung her hands together, and had almost died. She had been married to him twenty years, and was then "expecting"—as the neighbors phrased it. One woman thought of this, and went to comfort her. The pale minister came out and looked on awkwardly. For now this woman's heart was moved. His training had not taught him how to treat such cases.

III

MRS. HENNERY BEARSE

AUNT MERCY BEARSE sat in the front parlor, the Monday after, though it was a week-day night; a fire was hot in the stove, and shone red through the isinglass-door, while the lamp burned bright on the table, reflected in the small room from the glazed photographs; from the glazed, large crayon-drawing (enlarged, after his death, by mechanical means) of the late Captain Bearse; from the red-spotted, polished shells upon the mantel. The temperature was over eighty, and there was light; thus both the conditions of life were there, and the neighbors were attracted. Heat and light; heat and light for physical life, interest in one's neighbor for the spirit-

ual. Henry Bearse had come there, down from Brockton; bringing his new wife, come of rich, city people, in the shoe-industry; Aunt Mercy was proud to show her to the neighbors, proud of her daughter-in-law's tone of condescension to the seafaring Cape folk. They rather liked it, too. It was a democratic condescension, coupled with a readiness to meet socially, not exclusive, nor remote. There is rather a distinction in being patronized by your betters, who do still associate with you; and Aunt Mercy was proud of this connection, though, if a Cape girl, she would have hated her. Cape women usually like their daughters' husbands, but hate their sons' wives.

But, to-night, the talk was not of Brockton, or even Boston life, but of the Jethro Bacons. The dramatic

scene of the previous Sabbath was not forgotten; and, although Jethro had returned, apparently safe and well, it was hoped that something evil lay behind. The leading neighbors had been invited to meet the Brockton visitors, and others, seeing the unwonted light, had ventured in. All were women, of course: the men of the Cape, except the old and deaf, do not care for society.

"Mis' Bacon, she don't say a word," said Newera Howes. (The neighbors had got used to the name; but for the reader it should be explained that her father had been the only Sandwich Democrat who took the trouble to subscribe to the nearest newspaper of that party, some twenty miles away; and the name was but a contraction of the favorite leader-caption of that newspaper when in hopes of long-deferred

party success: "We stand upon the commencement of a New Era.")

"Poor thing, and she carrying her fifth child," said Mrs. Sampson. She was wife to a railway-man, and the youngest and most comely of the party, still with her own teeth, though one child born and another coming. Most Cape people used to have new sets of china-teeth put in when they got married; but Sandwich is not really on the Cape.

Miss Howes nodded. It would not have done to refer to this herself; but now she corrected: "The seventh, I think two were taken."

"Ah," nodded Aunt Mercy, sympathetically, "to think what that woman has been through."

"How horrid," simpered Mrs. Henry Bearse. Such talk in Brockton was now held to be improper—or else she

meant the death of the two, even perhaps the birth of the seven. For the civilizations of the Cape and of the modern factory-town still differ widely.

But Newera knew more; and did not choose that it should be forgotten. "That's what I felt, and I drove home with her from meeting. He was not there."

The neighbors nodded. This they knew. Indeed, many of them had followed on foot to the Bacon mansion.

"I stayed with her, while you went to hunt for Cap'n Bacon. Seemed 's if she'd almost rather you hadn't a gone. But you didn't find anythin', any of you—" Each neighbor looked at the other. "Did you now?" Each neighbor turned her eyes to the floor. "'Nd I guess the Cap'n wouldn't a been

overpleased to see ye ef ye had seen him —or you him," Newera added elliptically.

There was a loud guffaw from the door. One or two men had come in during the talk, and it was Lijah Bangs who laughed. "That's so! I thought I saw the old man a-comin' once. Took to the woods, I did. Hadn't got nothin' to say to Cap'n Bacon—not a thing!"

"Well," said Newera, "it might a been an hour—it might a been two hours—after you had all gone, and Cynthia Bacon got up, she did. She would go off, though I'd taken her body off and told her just to lie down and have some tea. And nothin' would do but she must hitch up the horse and go after him herself." Newera paused, conscious of her effect, for this was news.

"Did you go with her?" at last asked Aunt Mercy Bearse.

"I didn't offer to go with her. I didn't ask where she was going. But she went down the South Dennis road."

"Why, I went down the South Dennis road myself," said Lijah Bangs.

"Could she have turned off the old road to South Dennis?" said Mrs. Sampson. "By the old school-house in the woods?"

"There ain't been nobody that way for years," said Mrs. Bearse, "'xcept the children, berryin'. It's as poky a place as I ever see."

"That's curious," said Lijah. "I thought I saw somebody down that road myself. I kinder lingered along, for I mistrusted it might be the Cap'n. But it was only the Roman priest from down to Hyannis."

"Well, I declare," said Newera

Howes. "Mis' Dr. Macomber, she told me her husband had had a sudden call—yes, I believe it was that very night! I declare! Father Ryan—that's his name—he knocked 'em up after nine o'clock."

The company looked as if a blind trail had just been struck. There was no use asking the doctor. But Newera had another card to play.

"She went down the South Dennis road; and she hadn't been gone an hour when, just as it got to be candle-time, the Cap'n came in. The Cap'n, he come in. Well, I went down to meet him, jes' as soon as I could throw something on. 'Well, Cap'n Bacon,' says I, 'if you ain't given us a turn!' says I. 'Mis' Bacon, she hitched up and went off, an' all the folks, they started right after meetin'-time,' and says he, 'What's all this about?' and s's

I, 'Why, Cap'n Bacon, you don't mean to say as you calculate your friends won't worry none when your critter runs away, all alone, back to church—' an' 'Friends!' s's he, 'pretty friends,' s's he, 'it's friends as let a man alone and know his own business.'"

"Was Cap'n Bacon mad?" queried Aunt Bearse.

"Well, I don' know's he was an' I don' know *ez* he was," said Newera. "Like's not's he swore some, but he wasn't mad with me. You see, I stayed to home. But pretty soon Mis' Bacon, she came back, an' I went up stairs. An' I heard some talking, I heard them talking (you see I didn't go down again; I didn't want no tea). I heard 'em talkin'—I guess t'was nigh to midnight."

Pretty Mrs. Sampson shook her head. "Oh, these husbands! They're mad if

you do care; an' then, again, they're mad if you don't——"

"Well, I don't know's he was mad," said Newera. "And again I don't know's he wasn't. First, he talked pretty low, and then she talked kinder loud. I shut the door, but the voices com' up through the floor. Then he spoke very low, so you couldn't hardly hear any talkin' for a long time. An' the door opened, an' I heard him say, 'Take your choice,' an' he went out. It was snowin' again, but he went out. And when I went down to Mis' Bacon, her chamber door was locked."

This was a climax, as Newera well knew; she paused, and the company stared at one another, that one woman should refuse to talk it over with another in her time of trouble.

"She didn't make no complaint," said Aunt Mercy.

"She didn't make no complaint, and he didn't come back all that night, Cap'n Bacon didn't. And when I com' down to breakfast (it was kind o' early, but I always helped lay the fire), she was settin' ca'm an' kind o' set-like, and I could see she hadn't had her things off all that night."

"Well, I declare!" gasped Almira Bearse. The fashionable Brockton daughter was tightly laced.

"It can't a been the Cap'n as the priest got the doctor for," observed Aunt Mercy.

"An' do you know, since then," concluded Miss Howes, "since then, I ain't seen 'em speak to each other not so much as one word."

Suddenly, at this moment, the door opened, so that Captain and Mrs. Bacon must have heard the involun-

tary "hush" that escaped every woman's lips.

"Is this a prayer-meetin' or a funeral? We heard as how your Almiry was come down, and we thought we'd come and join the welcome—my wife and I."

Mr. Bacon spoke in a loud voice, with a touch of raillery which the neighbors were far too frightened to perceive. And as he said "my wife," he paused and looked at her until she nodded. Jethro was now a man of nearly fifty; and the beard he now wore was iron gray.

"My wife and I get kind o' lonely sometimes, now that the young folks is away. Jeth, he's at Brockton with Mis' Bearse's folks, and even little Seth's a-growing. How many children, Mis' Bearse?"

Almira bridled a little, but this strong

man beat down all modish barriers. She tried to make her husband answer, in vain. Finally, she seemed hypnotized into saying, "None."

"Lord 'a' massy," laughed Mr. Bacon. "Why, Cynthy, how many'd we'd 'a' had if we'd counted?"

Mrs. Bacon was silent, until her husband looked at her. Then she opened her two white rows of china-teeth for the monosyllable "six."

"An' one to come! an' one to come!" laughed the Captain, none too pleasantly. Then he turned to Almira again. "And how long married? How long married?" he reiterated. Mrs. Henry Bearse rose from her chair, and then checked her motion as if remembering that the house was hers and that she could not go. But Henry had money-dealings with the Captain, so he answered, "Three years." Lijah

Bangs was heard to titter, and the ladies rose to go.

"Time to begin! time to begin! ain't it, Mrs. Bacon?" jovially shouted her husband as the party broke up.

IV

THE MARSHES OF TINTAMARRE

A CAPE man's house is his castle, like an oyster's shell. In no part of the old Puritan kingdom is repression stronger; but no Italy or Spain has stronger passions. The kinder, shallower Latin countries dare express them; we repress them. Hence, we are oftener true.

The dramas of the New England country have hardly yet been written. The genius of Hawthorne first drew them forth, but dared not, perhaps cared not, to make them contemporary. Hence, the world of readers still looks upon "The Scarlet Letter," "The Minister's Hood," as some old fantastic tale of strange colonial days. But when the Yankee countryman

latches his unlocked door at night, he may close in safe from incurious, perhaps sympathetic neighbors, his solitary secret—as the oyster (to go back) its pearl—or its disease. For they all have their own secrets on the Cape, and recognize each other's right of property.

Tales are told, in old Spain, of lovers never speaking for a score of years, of loves untold, save in the confessional, of bodies kept pure whose only life-giving spirit was a human passion. But, then, these people never met. And in new Spain, in old Caracas, they have a story of a man and wife who loved each other for half a life—and never spoke.—The neighbors thought Jethro Bacon and his wife were much as usual. But, from that day on, until he died, when they were alone together, Jethro and his wife never spoke—save once.

Even before the neighbors, the formula, "Your father says," "Tell your mother," to young Jeth, 'Lisha, or Seth, was oftenest used. But those are always Cape ways, and the neighbors saw nothing strange. That peculiarly ungracious manner, as if the children were the only bonds between two antipathetic souls, is too common in Massachusetts to excite remark. The rest was acting—clumsy acting, if you like; Cape folk have no gift for outward show—but now and then. "Mrs. Bacon, it's time to go home," and "Mr. Bacon, will you tell Seth to get some wood," or such like phrases found utterance, and the neighbors were deceived. Yet Mrs. Bacon never asked her husband to bring in her wood.

Meantime, the four big sons grew up; two vanish from our story. Having, perhaps, no fair example of matri-

mony before their eyes, they did not marry, at least not on the Cape, though they all left sweethearts behind them. Newera Howes was not too old to be one of these; the eldest, Jethro, Jr., was locally considered "her last chance." But that young gentleman, who was first, because the oldest, to break with his father, was now in a Brockton shoe factory, and conducting a substantial flirtation with Mrs. Henry Bearse—it tickled the vanity of the married woman to carry off the lover from a girl, even so old a girl as poor Newera. Old Howes had died, and the poor woman's first use of liberty was to shorten her absurd name to Nora. Nora lived alone, having the little house and some forty shares of stock in the Barnstable bank. Out of this she contrived to paint it every year, for, as she did her own cooking and

could not cook, she bought very little food. Baking powder and canned things helped her out. And you must, on the Cape, paint your house and fence, once a year, or you lose caste. Of the Plymouth High School she was proud to be a graduate, but she had brought away no knowledge of domestic economy, only a set of Shakespeare, a forgotten layer of French, and Bain's "mental philosophy"—the last forgotten the more easily that she never had understood it. Yet she could read Shakespeare to the neighbors (she even organized classes) and was surely in need of such "mental philosophy" as her equipment afforded. But Bain, a Scotchman, had not dilated much on the emotions.

Needless to say that Nora was very much alone. When not busied with wondering whether she should marry

Jethro if he came back, (that she would, she knew well enough), she was fond of wandering with the volume of "The Tempest" by the sea. Her head told her that her lover would not come back. But hearts have a way of refusing to sign their own death-warrants; and Nora hoped he might grow ill, or friendless, or poor, and yet have need of her.

In April she would walk for mayflowers in the woods; for, once a year, she permitted herself to send Jethro a bunch, "From home" upon the card. Maidenly modesty or (to speak more exactly) shame of emotion, characteristic of the Cape, still permitted as much as this. It was quite the excitement of the year for Nora, and she looked forward to it many months. She was fond of getting the very first flowers, flowers that none would suspect

to be under the leaves. On this day (it was, perhaps, some years after old Jethro's escapade) she had been signally successful; a certain dry hollow, opening southward, enfolding a small bog, some miles from Sandwich, was known to her; and here, in the first faint warmth of a windy sun, from the crackle of dead leaves, she had drawn the tender clusters and made her nosegay, so sweet when plucked, so different in odor on the Boston streets. Placing them in a pasteboard-box, filled with green moss, she walked on to the neighboring hamlet of Bourne, a little Baptist church on the sandcliff in sight of Manomet, where the local express agent did not know her. For Nora was, of course, ashamed of her fidelity before the neighbors.

The packet sent, there still remained some hours of the day, and she

walked home along that loneliest of lonely shores. "The Tempest" was with her, and some crackers; and she sat down about sunset in the last covert before the great salt marshes. It would do for her supper; she ate a little and then read.

Miranda—ah, but she had beauty. Nora's forbears, who had won for her her little dower, had been unkind to her in this. She would have given all her neat white house for a tinge of rose in her face, a more womanlike swell to her breast. How strange that the world should be so arranged that love, which is the all-in-all, should win so little! Nora had, in full, the modern woman's contempt for beauty. She cared nothing for it in Jeth. Yet he was allured by this shell, by this contemptible thing in others— She checked her thoughts, lest they might

animadvert upon her God, and read again,

> Full fathom five thy father lies;
> Of his bones are coral made—
> Those are pearls that were his eyes;
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea change—

"Sea-change!" Ah, that she herself could have one! She and not her love "did fade;" her life that was never bright.

It was too dark to read, and Nora looked up. The shoreless bay lay still with the fall of the wind at sunset; the wooded shore was dark behind her, and what light there was came reflected from the dunes. Just below her, gleaming like white marble, cutting the evening sky with the semblance of a huge wave, they dazzled her, so ghastly white they were. And as she looked, a tall figure in black came out from

their shining summits, walking erect and splendidly, her face turned straight to Nora, so that she uttered almost a cry. She half thought she could change shapes with it, that it came in answer to her wish; it was so beautiful, the face turned full toward the last cloud's light, shadowed only by the mass of unbound dark hair, the neck, whiter than the white sand-wave behind her. Some impulse made Nora stand up. The figure stopped instantly; and the two gazed at one another, perhaps a hundred yards apart. Then the unknown (Nora saw now that she was a woman of forty) turned and walked eastward along the beach.

Nora waited until the black figure had disappeared again behind the dunes. Then she sighed and took the marsh-path back to Sandwich.

V

LIZZIE AMAZEEN

NORA wondered about the foreign woman until, as she rounded the lagoon of the Tintamarre, she saw, over the marshes, and over the long, dwindling sandspit that makes eastward from the Sandwich dunes to the little white light-house of Barnstable Harbor, a strange sail, at anchor in the calm bay. It was new, painted white; the peak of the dropped mainsail had the cut of a pleasure yacht; her Cape eyes told her that and sufficiently explained the situation. "Summer-folks." And Nora vaguely wondered if, had she looked like that and come to the Cape only for the summer, in such a yacht, young Jethro would have fallen in love with her. Coming by the harbor, she saw the old

Jethro mooring his own boat; bluff, and roomy in the hold, and full of fish-scales. His boat was deep and under-sparred, and any woman could have seen that it came from the stormy bay, not south of the Cape, where waters are shallow and harbors plenty. This is the sort of boat she would inherit, even if she married Jethro. And Nora ended with a sigh, as commonly her musings did.

She would not have admitted it to herself, but the excitement of her year was gone with the sending of her mayflowers. Little chance that Seth would come home that summer; it was but a dreary household and his mother, Nora knew, kept him well supplied with money—even now that he was getting on at Brockton. For the Bacons were very rich, and it was no secret that the two boys spent the

money. Old Jethro, though he never spoke blame to his wife, had been heard to complain of that. It was the one point upon which meek Mrs. Bacon—she had never been meek in her youth—in later years would face him. The boys were hers, she said, and rumors even came that Jethro the younger, with some extravagant young companions, had taken a cottage on the bluff at Siasconset, where Mrs. Bearse was known to have a summer residence.

Skirting the lagoon absent-mindedly, Nora did not come into the village, but found herself behind the old, abandoned glass-works. The earliest attempt in the colony at making glass, they had just, for the second time, been abandoned. Whether labor was dear or coal was high, Sandwich knew not; but the town languished in consequence. Certainly, there was sand enough. In

all the century the works had been there the dunes only crested the higher across the meadows; but now (it was said) even the sand came from Indiana. But glass, one supposes, must be made in a sand-country; as aërated waters at a spring, or eau de Cologne at Cologne.

The great, squat, brick buildings lay in her way; the fence-gates hung loose; green grass was growing in the cobbles of the yards; green moss, too, was in the crevices of the brick—giving the whole affair more color than is usual in our uncompromising climate. Leeks, certainly, were on the roof—reminding cultured Nora of Fluellen. Every pane of every window of every factory was broken; had one been discovered whole, there had not been a boy at school in Sandwich till the anomaly were rectified. Since even Mr. Jethro Bacon's salary for care-taking had been discon-

tinued, it was outlawed ground, and free asylum to all boys who dared enter it. For the place was haunted; small boys would not enter it by day, and none by night. It looked haunted, as Nora entered; but Nora was afraid of no ghosts, not even of the past. Before her was a great stone-and-plaster furnace and chimney, an ugly seam now opening in its side, the rubbish falling in; Nora remembered when it had been aglow, and she had gone there with Jethro to see them swing the red bowls of glass. The twilight now fell darkly, in the sombre courts; she hurried on. There was the main building where the master's office was; the only *room* in the works, with high desks and a large, circular iron stove, upon whose polished ring those privileged could sit and put their feet. Had the works gone on, her Jethro was hoping for a superin-

tendency; had he got it perhaps—There was a light in the room now! Nora's heart beat quicker. She was not curious—but it was easy to look in the shutterless windows as she passed. The breaks were many, and stuffed with rags; but, through what remained of glass, she saw—nothing. Only a fire in the stove, glowing red-hot through the gloom. It was easy to see in all the room; and there was no one there. Why did poor Nora sigh as she went on and out into the village street? Was it likely that he would have been there—a merry place after Brockton! A dead-and-alive place, any part of Sandwich, to one who went, nigh every day, to Boston—Nora thought that he would call upon her, in Boston, if she could get some friends to visit with.—But why was there a fire in that room in the glass-works?

The spell of the deserted industry seemed to be over the part of the village that lay nearest them; for the houses, too, were deserted. Rows and rows of wooden tenements she passed, empty like the works, and rotting; only here the village boys had not dared break windows. The first house to be inhabited was dwelt in by her who was the poorest in the town, outside the poorhouse (which in itself was an "elegant residence;" few people, in Massachusetts villages, live in so fine a house as is the poor-farm)—old Mis' Amazeen. Reversing the old English custom, you cannot, on the Cape, tell whether "Mis'" means Miss or Mistress; but Mis' Amazeen was a maid.

Nora had grown chilled with the walk home; the April evening was sharp, and something bade her enter for a cup of tea. No Cape woman is

too poor to give another woman tea. The visit proved opportune enough, for Mis' Amazeen had just had *her* excitement of the year—a letter from her younger sister in Chicago. And it sent her, as Nora knew, not mayflowers, but money. Indeed, Mis' Amazeen had no other means of support; and it was sometimes—not questioned—but wondered, why the sister did not keep her with her, rather than in idleness at Sandwich. But Mis' Amazeen let on that her sister's position in Chicago was far too proud for that.

"Yes, she allers writes to me twice a year. Come a little earlier'n usual, this time, but then, the season's early. Not married yet? No—Barbary never was the marryin' kind. Might a had—might a had—'most anybody!" Mis' Amazeen closed, at a loss for sufficient grandeur in Sandwich. "You remem-

ber her? *She* wouldn't stay on, workin' in the cranberry-bogs. *She* wouldn't a looked at any gen'l'm'n down here." This was a return thrust; for Cape folk, though they don't ask questions, sometimes know; and women are more merciless to each other's love affairs than men are. "We Amazeens ain't none of us the marryin' kind. Don't like to be bossed round, I guess. Want to read it?"

"You read it to me," said Nora, tactfully.

With as near an approach to a smile as Mis' Amazeen permitted herself, she drew spectacles upon her sharp, black eyes, and unfolded the precious missive on her knee. "'Chicago, April 4th, 1890.—Dear Sister:' (she don't date no house 'cause she's changin' her boardin'-house," Mis' Amazeen interrupted herself, looking over her spectacles).

Nora sat expectant.

"Wa'n't fash'nable enough, I guess."

Nora nodded.

"Like as not, she's gone to one o' them grand hotels. Well, 'Chicago, April 4th, 1890.—Dear Sister: Here's hopin' you're well as I am at this writin'. It seems long since I heard from you' (does seem a long way off, now, don't it?), 'but I hope all is well at Sandwich. I sometimes think I'd like to come East an' see the old place again, but my employer he says he can't spare me, an' less than ever this summer, now they're takin' on a new department in the business. There don't many Cape folks come out here, so don't bother with sendin' anythin'. I enclose—' no matter about that. I'll say that o' Barbara, she always was open-handed an' free with her money."

This meant, and Nora knew it to

mean, that the enclosure had been fabulous in amount; so she nodded again, though the very chair she sat on needed immediate repair.

"'I can't send you my picture, as the last I tried weren't good. Last week I went to a sociable, and I'm goin' to be taken in my party dress.' I suppose they has balls every week in Chicago?"

"I suppose so," said Nora, absently.

"'Write if you want any more money. Some time you must come out here, but the journey costs hundreds of dollars. Your affectionate sister, Barbara.' That's all."

Nora started; the letter ended sooner than she had expected—yet a tenth as much from him— "No, no more tea, thank you."

As Nora walked up the hill she saw again the fine white sloop leaving the light and starting free on the northwest

wind, not close-hauled—that must mean Provincetown or Wellfleet. Such yachts usually bore the other way, to Boston or Plymouth. The new sail gleamed in the last level light, cutting the dim, low shore and starlit east; the only other high light in the picture, still nearer in the foreground, like a line of stilled, white breakers, were the dunes. —Suddenly she remembered that Lady of the Dunes. Where was she? And Nora fancied she must have come in that white yacht and had departed in it.

VI

JETHRO BACON, JUNIOR

ONE morning, in the winter following, Jethro Bacon was more than usually late for breakfast, thereby causing an extraordinary occurrence—nothing less than a conversation between him and his wife. Cynthia Bacon's temper, which had for many years proved equal to a silent dignity under emotional misfortune, suddenly gave way before the petty, daily vexations of their domestic life. To begin with, she had a headache and a bad throat, and had risen rather late herself; then she had come down in a flannel wrapper to find that Seth, their youngest and only boy at home, had failed to bring in the wood. It was bitter cold, but in wrapper and slippers she had to make an excursion

to the snowy woodshed. When the fire was at last started she had brewed herself a bowl of strong tea, which had put an edge to her temper rather than her appetite. She was "feeling miserably, and not looking her best;" in fact, she abused the privilege New England countrywomen use of neglecting, after marriage, their personal appearance. As was her custom of mornings, she had laid aside her teeth, but to-day she had about her sore throat a strip of yellow flannel containing strips of raw, fat pork, her favorite remedy, and she was rereading a letter from her boy Jethro, the apple of her eye; it begged her for twelve hundred dollars, "to save him from disgrace."

A vigorous stamping was heard at the outer door, and Mrs. Bacon turned herself to scold her Seth. Instead of whom, it was her husband, strong and rosy, the

shaven chin, with close, low collar of gray hair and smooth lip becoming him better than the black moustache of yore or the beard which had succeeded it. People wondered why Jethro changed his looks so often.

As he entered, his strong features assumed the grim expression that his wife's presence, now for nearly twenty years, had always set upon them like a seal. He hung his coat in the little entry, and then, shaking the snow off vigorously, strode in his boots to the empty breakfast-table. No breakfast was ready; but he did not look for it.

"I can't help it, 'n' am just beat out, 'n' I'm tired of being your slave, 'n' I wun't be looked at so, Mister Bac'n. I'm just tired of it. 'N' here's a letter from Jeth, 'n' he says he's ruined if I can't give him that money, 'n' where Seth is I don't know, about no good

I'll be bound, 'n' it's a Sunday mornin', 'n' *you* don't never get in no wood—" The words came out in a shrill monotone without the slightest touch of pathos. Mrs. Bacon never cried; she only scolded.

Jethro Bacon said nothing, but went to the door and threw out tea and tea leaves. Then he refilled the pot and set it on the stove to stew, at the same time cutting some slices of bacon on a griddle. Bread of cream-of-tartar, bacon, and strong tea for breakfast, pie and fried steak for dinner, was their Cape fare. There were always pies; Mrs. Bacon made them by the dozen in her brighter days, when she felt the joy of living—or the malice of it. Secretly, she was bound to outlast her husband, despite his rosy cheeks. She knew that all he had would be left to her. "An' every morning o' your life

you go out like that, an' every evening, an' only Seth to do for me——"

Mr. Bacon, having a better appetite than usual (the snow was ankle-deep and his walk had been six miles in fine snow and sand), got up and went to the dresser for a pie. But he looked at her, as he did so.

"I can't help it, I'm got to speak," cried, from vexation, his better half. "I don't care if I did promise. Jethro must be saved—" She stopped in a tremor, for Mr. Bacon laid his cup down. But when he spoke, it was in kindly tones enough.

"You've had all my income, Cynthy."

"I know what I promised—I know what I promised—you needn't throw it up in my face. But I did it for my children, and I must look after them."

"Nice children," said Jethro. "Nice children. There's Jethro — looking

after a poor bloodless thing, took service with her husband, and stole his money. And Silas—he's off with a play-actress, and 'Lisha—likely lost at sea. And Seth—"

"Seth's gone to get the Sunday paper," said Mrs. Bacon, unhumorous, conscienceless of climax.

"Yes, and after he's read it, spends Sunday playing bluff and drinking whiskey with them Onset boys. They've got what they call a club over at Poquoit—Hoodlums, is what they call 'em—Hellions, *I* call 'em!" and Mr. Bacon slammed the door—reopening it in a moment.

"Goin' to meetin'?" said he.

Mrs. Bacon looked at her pink flannel wrapper and the tumbler where her teeth were. "No," she answered.

"Then I won't hitch up." The door closed again—more gently this

time—and had Mrs. Bacon taken the trouble to go to the window, she might have seen him, plowing heavily through the snow-bound road. But he turned back after a moment, and entered the stable.

The door of the "spare-room" opened slowly behind Mrs. Bacon, but she did not turn her head. Jethro the younger peered cautiously out; then walked to the window and looked down the road; then came angrily up to his mother and threw himself upon a chair beside the stove. "Couldn't get it, mother? Damned old miser."

"You heard," said Mrs. Bacon.

"Well, I must have it. I tell you, I *must* have it."

The jingle of a sleigh was heard outside, and Mrs. Bacon went to the door to pick up the Sunday newspaper. Though churches close their doors, the

news industry is active on the Cape; a special paper-train is run from Boston, and on many a road the only vehicle you may meet, of a Sunday, is the newsman's cart, hurrying from hamlet to hamlet with his huge bundles of gaudily covered Sunday newspapers—undertaking to purvey all that the human mind need know or the human soul crave, to that day's date. But, for once, the paper lay between them, untouched.

The door opened again, and Seth came in. He started at seeing his brother.

"Hallo, *you* here?"

Jeth deigned no notice.

"Guess you haven't seen the papers"—Jeth started—"why, look there," and, turning the leaves hastily, Seth pointed to a "local"—"Brockton Items. Shortage of Accounts—Prominent Society Man of Brockton Missing." No

names were mentioned but that of the owner of the factory, Henry Bearse. "Guess it's you, all right," ended Seth.

Mrs. Bacon looked at Jethro in dismay. "It's too late, Jeth"—almost tenderly.

"Nonsense, mother," said Jeth. "Easy enough to fix that, if I had the money, to-morrow morning. I'm temporarily absent on business. Henry wouldn't dare kick. But it's not the money he wants—he wants—he wants to down me." And the young man, at some recollection, grinned unpleasantly. He was showily dressed—light trousers and black coat, a diamond in his scarf, and moustache not yet out of twist with some barber's essence.

Mrs. Bacon made a sudden decision. "Seth," she said, "Seth—you must go and get your father and bring him back."

"Go 'n' get father? Think I see

myself. And, perhaps, if I did, he'd be glad to see me! Whip-poo!"—the interjection stands for a whistle in a quick descending minor third, expressive, in Seth's symbolism, of incredulity.

"Seth, you must go and get your father. Tell him your brother Jeth's here now and the officers are after him. He may not have believed the letter."

"Dunno where he's gone," said the youth, sullenly.

"Gone? He goes to walk—every afternoon—" Mrs. Bacon paused. "He never goes in the village—you might try the South Dennis road—I mean the old road—through the woods, beyond the old town-hall—"

"That's three miles, if it's an inch," growled Seth.

"You'd go twice as far to go to your card-parties—Jethro, make your brother go."

"He needn't go to oblige me—but I'll break his d——d head if he don't," said Jeth, inconsistently.

"And then you can go to your club —and you needn't come home to tea," added the mother, in a tone as nearly coaxing as she was capable of.

"Yes, 'n' the drunker you are the better," grumbled the elder brother. "There'll be a hot time enough at home here."

"Why can't I take the team?" said Seth, in a last effort of laziness.

"He's taken it," said the mother.

"Thought you said he'd gone to walk. Nice day for walking! ugh!—" But Seth dragged himself to the door and began muffling up.

"You may meet him—perhaps he'll bring you back—only tell him, he must come."

"Think he'll do anything?" said Jeth, after the door closed.

"Do anything?" Mrs. Bacon tapped her fingers impatiently. "He can sell the old cranberry-bog—the Roxana. It's too far off to cultivate. He was saying so only the other day."

The hours waned; the snow began again, and the gray twilight of a wet, still snowstorm followed. Nothing more was said, but the two sat silent. After a time the young man took up the Sunday newspaper and began to read it. But his mother sat still, her hands folded on her lap, and waited.

VII

THE HOUSE AT SOUTH DENNIS

SETH BACON was a "bad boy," said the people of Sandwich; and when Cape people come to criticising their neighbors, it means something. It was not only that he drank, was idle and disorderly, broke windows, ravaged property, gambled, courted reckless girls; once or twice he had been arraigned in Barnstable court-house for more serious offences than even Cape good-nature would stand. No one in New England country-towns now expects parents to control their young people, and a generation of such manners has produced its natural consequences. Jethro performed more than the whole duty of a Cape father in that he had not only got Seth out of his

"court scrapes," but had thrashed him vigorously, whenever he caught him privately committing an offence. And in a society where a school-boy sues his teacher for being feruled, Seth resented this stern treatment, and bore malice for it. In fact, he had sworn to his cronies of the Poquoit Club that next time it happened he would "have it out with the old man."

Poquoit, too, was a village of ill repute. There was no church within five miles, no justice of the peace, no police, not even a constable, and but one abandoned school-house. It was not that the town was too poor to maintain a teacher—the law required it—but no teacher, that is, no woman (and on the Cape they are all women), dared stay there—or, when one did, the children would not go. Poquoit folk are more than half Indian, and the Indian is more

than half negro. There is not even a Roman Catholic priest nearer than Father Ryan, at Hyannis; and in the most retrograde of Yankee villages the confessional will save young girls when all else fails.

Seth's friends held their club in this very deserted school-house; a trout-stream made the pretext of their meeting there; but the whisky drunk in the school-house would float the trout caught there, easily, to sea.

It suggests a curious commentary upon his manners, that Seth's particular friend, just now, should have been "Al" Costello, Mrs. Henry Bearse's younger brother. But so it was: in fact, it was Costello, quite *au courant* of the affair, who had brought the item in the *Sunday Globe* to Seth's attention; it was his custom to come down on the Saturday afternoon train for the Sunday

pleasures of the Poquoit Club. He had hired a horse and wagon, well stored behind with articles that the strict "prohibition" stores of Sandwich could not have furnished, and had driven Seth to his father's house that morning, where (having no desire to meet the old people, still less the younger Jethro, whom he guessed was there) he had waited for Seth, with the horse, outside.

"Old man wouldn't pony up this morning," said Seth, laconically. "And now mother wants me to go find him on the South Dennis road. Likely, she thinks I'd walk three miles and back in a storm like this!"

"Where is he?" asked Al.

"Gone for a walk, same's he always does at night," said Seth. "What makes the old codger tramp off twice a day, rain or shine, is more'n I can see. He's healthy enough — damn

him." And Seth pulled up his coat-collar, to shield his own rather waxy complexion from the slanting snow, and the raw blast that made his eyes turn redder yet. "You don't mind just takin' a turn that way? We can get the cross-road over from Bass River to Poquoit."

"'Fraid o' gettin' licked?" said Al.

"No, damn him—he won't try that again—guess he's more'n likely to try it, though, for chasin' after him to get Jeth out of a scrape."

"Nawthin'd please Henry more than to get no money back. He's been tryin' to get his thumb on Jethro ever since he knew. He don't dare fight him—an' he don't want no divorce—not before the old man's cut up," chuckled Al.

"Your sister's a snortin' pretty girl," said Seth, enviously. "When'd he first

get onto it?"—but into the fraternal discussion of Mrs. Bearse's amour we need not follow them.

They passed the last of the straggling, wooden houses, some weather-stained with old shingles worn by a century of exposure to the texture and color of raw silk (for Sandwich is not far enough down the Cape to be all fresh-painted), and turned off into the old way, deep-worn through the mossy turf, with a footing of the white sand, on which the snow had melted, "as on the desert's face." The wind already seemed warmer, coming from the southern shore; the scattered forest of pitch-pine was dreary enough. They passed the old "town-hall," lonely and dismantled, the product of some town dispute now ended. The twilight fell apace, and the snow had turned to rain. The road had many forks, and Seth's

geography became confused. Was it Bass River, or South Dennis, they should come to first? Cape woods, too, look all alike, yet this seemed strange to him. Cape people are no great travellers, at least to neighboring towns; each township forms a community by itself; many a Yarmouth man has never been to Chatham, and calls it twenty miles, or thirty miles, as the humor strikes him.

Al Costello adjured Seth to "drop the old man and make for the club," and Seth was more than ready, feeling he had done enough for brotherly affection, but the expected four corners did not appear. "Ask the way at that house," said Al. "Who lives in this hole, anyhow?"

Seth did not know. It was a modern, two-story, painted cottage, without a stable, a wood-pile in the shed behind

it, and red paper-shades at the windows. A lamp was lit at one of them. Suddenly, Seth gave a grunt of astonishment. "It's dad's team," he said. "What's the old man doing here? Just hold the reins, will you?"—and, jumping out, he ran to the illuminated window, and tried to peer through the crack between the shade and the casement. At the same moment, Jethro Bacon himself emerged from the front door, and caught him in the act of spying. In a trice, the sturdy old man had grasped Seth by the collar, and hauled him, as one might a prying cur, headlong to the road.

"Don't, father," whined the youth, "I only came to tell you Jeth was goin' to gaol, that's all—Mother's pet, he is, you know." A mixture of a sneer, of rage, and pain, distorted at

once Seth's mean face. "She's waitin' for you—the old woman."

Jethro took a step toward his son—whether to strike him, Al Costello (who, though rather frightened himself, was highly relishing this family scene from the sleigh), could not tell; for at the moment Seth rose and with the cry, "That's the last time you'll ever hit me, by God!" he saw the gleam of a knife. Costello whipped up his horse and drove rapidly away.

But the old man was too quick. Gripping both Seth's arms at once, a vicious twist made him drop the weapon with a howl of pain. It fell in the snow, and Mr. Bacon threw it far into the forest. And then, indeed, he gave his son a thrashing. Not a word was spoken.

"Now, get after your friend there!" he said, when he had done. Seth fairly

ran away along the road, Costello, who had pulled up at a safe distance, watching him. When Seth got fairly to the wagon he turned, with an oath.

"That's the last you'll see of me," he called to his father.

Jethro made no reply, but stood there, watching, as Seth got in and Costello whipped up again.

"Why didn't you come and help?" Seth turned upon him.

Costello was silent. Fist-fights were well enough, but the sight of the knife had shocked him, and the old man's strength and blazing eyes had awed him, for Seth, without the knife, had been a doll in his hands.

"What'll you do now?" said Costello at last. "You can't go back to your folks."

"Damn it, I don't want to," blustered Seth. "Where's the whisky?"

—and pulling a bottle from the case behind them, he broke the neck off on the wheel, and drank, with a trembling hand, of its fiery contents. And so the last of Jethro's sons left home.

VIII

NORA HOWES

"SO he's back," said Aunt Mercy Bearse.

"Yes, mother, he's back. He had the money before we could get out a warrant, that very Monday. I couldn't do nothin'. And Almira — she says she'll go with him if he's discharged. And her father, old Costello—he kind o' backs her up."

Mrs. Bearse knitted violently. "She's just a piece—that's what she is. As for that Jeth—and there's poor Newera awaitin' all the time."

Henry Bearse's weak face looked almost malignant. "How do you suppose the old man gets all the money? Those boys must o' cost him a lot, first and last."

"Well, I wouldn't say they was such a lovin' couple; but Cynthia Bacon, they do say, she can have just what she likes short o' the Roxana bog. Newera says he wouldn't sell that, tho' 'tis way out in the woods. He's mortgaged that Bangs farm he foreclosed on poor Lijah."

"That's so?" said Henry. "Well, all I got to say is, Seth a'n't worth it. It'll be more next time."

"'Sh," said Mrs. Bearse. "There comes Newera. Good evenin', Newera!" It was a mild spring afternoon, and Nora Howes walked in from the village street, a light shawl thrown over her head.

"Good evenin', Nora," said Henry. "Comin' in?"

"Yes, Aunt Mercy. It's a fine warm night."

"Quite seasonable, I call it," answered Henry.

"Sho," said Mrs. Bearse. "You ain't been round by the marsh?"

"I've been to Cynthia Bacon's," said Nora, simply. "You haven't heard any news of Seth?"

"I heard one feller say't he was gettin' quite a salary on a baseball team," said Henry. "Another feller told as how he'd joined one o' them high-kickin' theatrical companies. Seth ain't much good!"

"No, Seth ain't much good," repeated Nora, absently.

"They ain't any on 'em much good," hazarded Henry.

"No, they ain't any of them much good," repeated Nora.

Mrs. Bearse burst in, explosively, as if she had just received permission to talk of the Bacon affairs. "Do tell, Newera—Nora, I mean—how'd the old man ever come to come round?

It ain't true as he's really sold the old bog? Always seemed like that Roxana bog was the very apple of his eye. Was you there when he come back?"

Nora nodded, and hesitated.

"O' course, Henry — that is, her brother—young Costello, that is, told us how she sent Seth after Mr. Bacon."

"Al Costello told me they had quite a scrap, out Dennis way," added Henry.

"He—had to have some money," said Nora. "I went in, and found her waiting there."

"'D you see young Jeth?" queried Aunt Mercy, breathlessly. Poor Nora still could color.

"I saw—Mr. Bacon—and he told me he was in trouble, and asked me do what I could. And Mrs. Bacon told me how she'd asked Captain Bacon to sell the Roxana bog."

"He won't sell the Roxana bog."

It was Lizzie Amazeen, standing at the open door.

"No," said Nora, simply. "Mrs. Bacon, she wouldn't leave Jeth, so I went out to try find Mr. Bacon. And when I met him, he was driving back the Catholic priest."

"Father Ryan!" cried Aunt Mercy.

"Father Ryan. And I told him what the trouble was, and Father Ryan talked to him. And I walked home alone; but when I come in after, he'd said he'd pay the money if he had it. So I lent it to him."

"You lent it!" shouted Henry Bearse.

"I lent it," said Nora, defiantly.

"Dear me, to think of his gettin' in with the priest, now," said Aunt Mercy, pacifically.

"And why not?" It was Lizzie Amazeen, who spoke, angrily.

"He's got money enough, if them

stories Al Costello tells about his boat over to Harwichport is true," said Henry Bearse.

"And why shouldn't he have a boat there?" said Lizzie.

"Oh, I suppose there's more fine yachting over Holmes's Hole way," explained Henry, feebly. "He'd better sell his boat rather'n borrow o' Nora, here."

"Please, say nothing more about it," said Nora. "He's going to pay me back. What do you hear of Barbara, Miss Amazeen?"

Lizzie laughed, and pulled out a letter. "She's gone further West. Spite o' what I said about our not bein' the marrying kind, Miss Howes, it looks like she was goin' to be married, after all. Well, I must go."

"I'll go with you," said Nora, as they interchanged glances.

"There's a girl you oughter married, rather than that Brockton woman," said Mrs. Bearse.

"Poor Nora," said Henry. "Think I'd take Jeth Bacon's leavings? Why'd she loan him that money? Almira Costello and Nora Howes weren't just the same kind. Darned if I don't believe I'll let Almira go, after the old man cuts up. If he likes, Jeth can have my leavings. She won't get no alimony then."

IX

THE HEAD OF PAMET

JETHRO BACON got up sail, one June evening, and lay out eastward. Behind him was the strange little harbor; sea turns to sound, and sound to bay, and bay to shallow; and shallow to a stream, that winds and dwindles tortuously until it leaves the sea behind it and finds itself a pasture-brook amid the bay-clad hills—only that its flow is salt that laves the meadows, the bitter water that is immortal, the changeless font that both preserves and kills. Salt streams are decked with asphodel, not amaranth—less classically, with dulse and changeless sea-bloom, not with mortal cowslips and violets. The sweet spring stopped at the salt-encrusted march of the two worlds of

earth and sea; a few feet separated the rose-mallows from the beach-plums; on either side of the stepping-stones that crossed the end of the brook, the water-cresses ended or the sea-weed began. Yet, but for this, it was a country meadow; the sea's pulse beat there, but its voice was far away. For on the mild south shore of the Cape the coast line shelves, and the sea is tame. Long, low headlands dry out of shallow tides, rooted in beach-grass, thatched with low pitch-pine; and only those who live there through the winters know how that shallow sea can eat into the bases of the shore, so that a cape may go in a night, or a new harbor be cut in a high east tide. But the little streams, set with oysters, hold the land in better, and at their mouths are little villages, each with its fathom-deep harbor, living on the seatilth like a farm-stead on its farm.

In one of these Jethro Bacon kept his new boat, on the other sea, so that Sandwich had just heard of it; a white sloop, painted without a name, and, since he had had it, the Cape train knew him no more. It was natural that a mariner in his old age should take to sailing, even on profitless voyages; and Vineyard Sound and Chatham Bay were better pleasure-seas than Cape Cod Bay. For there the northern storms beat pitilessly, and the Arctic current is cold. One might fancy these two sides, so world-wide different, yet but a few land-miles apart, explain the inconsistencies of Cape character. North of the Cape the fauna and flora change; oysters and sharks, too, cease, and seals and the Northern shells begin. So, in the woods, the holly ceases, and the Northern berries come.

Jethro stood out to windward, in his unknown craft, upon an unknown er-

rand. He stood far out into the sound (as, indeed, the channel required), so that even a curious watcher, had such there been upon the shore, would have seen the dusk come on before he turned. Behind him, the glassy, inmost pool lay, rosy, opaline in the sunset; the tide was with him, and grew in strength, but still without a ripple; an oar gave him steerage-way. Aunt Sally Thacher's lamplit window, that serves instead of light-house on the outer point, was passed in silence—"There goes Jethro Bacon again!" was doubtless all she said. Bass River people had even ceased to wonder that he had not named his boat; probably his invention, or his paint, had given out; it was a Cape man's privilege to sail as he liked, and that of a meddlesome and ignorant Washington government to hamper traffic—if it knew enough, and could. So Jethro drifted

on with the tide and a loose sail until he passed, miles out, between the fir-topped poles that marked Bass River "harbor;" then he slacked his sheet and headed out to sea.

The little standing-room was plain, but scrupulously clean; for Jethro did no fishing. In the cabin was the ordinary wooden berth, and table hinged on the centre-board. Jethro's oil-skins hung in the corner; on one side, forward, was a little galley. Jethro dropped the tiller in a comb, and went forward to light the oil-stove to make his tea. But first he opened a door to starboard; and here the visitor, if he ever had any, would be surprised. For this was a dainty little state-room, clean white spreads upon the bunk, and pictures on the walls. Among them was a photograph of a beautiful woman, prettily framed, and some books were on a little shelf.

The water-tin put on, Jethro hastened back to the tiller. He had set the helm too far up and (the wind still lightening) a jibe was imminent. Releasing the tiller, Jethro took advantage of the luff to strike a match to light his pipe. Behind him was a fan-light of crimson cloud, and in the purple gloaming, some miles ahead, gleamed the low, white tower of Monomoy. Jethro headed for it, widening the distance between him and a tow of heavy barges that lay farther southward, meaning the outside passage, while Jethro made for Pollock's rip.

Even here, at midnight, though the tides ran hard, the great forces of the sea were silent. No white water boiled upon the shoals, as usual. Jethro had finished his tea long since, and now sat smoking; his keen eyes were as bright, and his grizzled hair as plentiful as

when this history began. More than all, he looked like a man that had been happy; and such are always young. The night was dark ahead, and darker to the west, where, over the land, a thunder-storm was forming. Out of habit, his eye wandered to and fro, from the waves ahead to the throat of his mainsail; but it may be doubted if his mind was on these. People wondered that Captain Bacon kept so young; for, in his old age, he had grown poor. All his four sons had turned out ill, and cost him much. His lands were gone; only the homestead, which stood in his wife's name, remained; his homestead and the white sloop. But that his creditors knew nothing of; not even Mrs. Bacon, or she would have sold it. It was said, too, that she, at least, had plenty of money laid by. But what she spent was from him.

The little Chatham light moved by, and, far ahead, the three lights of Nausett, Orion-like, appeared. The sky was black above the Cape, riven and flushed with silent lightning; but to the eastward it shaded into bright azure, sown with stars. Unvexed by the little land-storm, the sea swelled slowly, and as Jethro stood far out, liking the lonely ocean, his only company was the hoarse sound of some porpoise, spouting? No, it was a whale—actually; and the old whaler delighted in it. Here one got away from folks, among natural beings that went their appointed courses as the Lord directed. Here one could be what one was. His chest dilated with the long, free fill of ocean-air. Even Jethro Bacon could not sleep, in the stillest night, at sea; but he set the helm again and went into the cabin. There, in the light of the little lamp, he looked at

the woman's picture, long and silently; then, touching his lips to it, he came out and settled himself for the night.

Morning broke, off the highlands. A shore-wind came at sunrise that brought, with the scent of pine and bay-leaves, the fresher thunder off the surf upon the beach. This is the most terrible of all the perils of the American coast; that spot where, far from any shelter, the unseen floor of the ocean rises to the Peaked Hill Bars shoals. Yet Jethro kept inshore; taking a glass, he scanned the lonely cliff, here rising to its highest above the short breakers of the undertow. Another shoal, and then a very drowning-trap of tide-swept inner channel lay between him and the beach, as Jethro well knew; while, seaward, the Peaked Hill Bars already were getting between him and the deep sea. At last he saw, in all the league of sky-

line, one black speck upon the crest of sand. Dropping his signal flag, he stood off shore again.

It is a proverb of the Cape that the wind must box the compass for him who goes to Provincetown; it was nearly noon before Jethro could lay his course again to windward of Billingsgate. Provincetown was left behind, as he stood inshore again, up the bay. The circle of the coast was visible almost to Manomet; Barnstable steeples, even the Sandwich dunes.

But Jethro was not bound for Sandwich. Another sunset was nigh ere he had done the hundred miles without a harbor, and put in to Wellfleet. This, of all the decaying Cape towns, is, perhaps, the farthest advanced in dissolution. Sheltered by the long hook of Billingsgate Island (itself now disappearing, so that little but the light re-

mains), its shallow harbor—which once sent out a larger fleet of sail than Boston, aye! than even Salem itself—now bears most often but a gunner's dory. The chapel, where a mighty parson used to threaten hell, now rots unvisited; of all Parson Thacher's work, only now is growing the row of poplars he planted by the door. They, indeed, are mighty for the Cape—high as the eaves of the low roof; and, two centuries after his long sermons, *they* are living still.

Jethro moored his sloop in the lee of the tall wharf (room enough there was to shelter a score of whalers), and pulled his dory to the beach. He went up to the village and made some purchases; then he rowed back to the sloop, put up sail again, and stood back northward, after running through the Gut at Jeremy's Point. After a mile or two of quiet water, he came to such another

little estuary as he had left the night before, only lonelier, quainter, still more in miniature. Into the shallow cove, lying only open to the west, bubbles a fresh, little stream; this is the mouth of Pamet. The stream itself, born but a few miles back, and under the very sand-cliffs that guard the outer ocean, flows backward a few miles, cutting the Cape; but never more than a brooklet, fringed with dainty willows: this is the Pamet River. High to the south the Wellfleet forests rise, very wild and savage, with quite the air of mountain-gorges, such effects the steep formation of the sand-hollows permits; the eye takes for tall trees the little pitch-pines that densely crown them; they drop suddenly in wooded combs and hollows to a level of bright meadow and flowered pastures; this is the Pamet Valley.

Jethro walked, away from the fad-

ing light, up this dearest of toy valleys. The turns and cups of the steep downs glowed redly, before and above him; the nearest village—Truro—lies on the upland, out of sight; he picked some belated mayflowers as he walked, fording the sweet water for the very pleasure of it, where the road crosses, on a grand stone bridge, with an arch some yard or two across. For this is the only running water on the real Cape, and they make much of it. He threaded his way through close apple-orchards, lifting his head lest the topmost boughs should scratch him; he cut the topmost branch of the tallest willow for a switch; he whistled like a boy to the bluebirds and the robins. The valley took again another turn; the downs on either side grew higher, steeper, the brook tinkled faintly. He must have been three miles from its mouth. Again it curved, and

before him lay a little amphitheatre of hills, still opening westward to the warm, brown light; their slopes all netted with sheep-paths. Up one of these he climbed; turned to the left, around a brow of the comb; all around him circled the soft green lap of hills, rising steeper to the top, where, on the shoulder, the white sand showed through —like a girl's shoulder above her gown —and over it eddied a gray sea-fog, and now, again, he heard the rote of the sea.

Below him, in the hollow, lay a shining spring, gay with flag and the swamp-pink, through which the water sparkled. This is the Head of Pamet. Beside him, on the green shelf of down, just lower than the ocean-winds, nestled a little cottage, rose-embowered; as Jethro hastened his steps, the door opened, the woman of the photograph came out, and Jethro folded her close in his arms.

X

THE BEACH AT NAUSETT

THE next day the weather had changed. Gentle rain fell through the night; but the morning showed signs of wind. The rain stopped, and the gray, even sky broke into billows of cloud; at the same time the thunder of the breakers, far below upon the outer beach, was audible from behind the downs.

Barbara Amazeen came home at noon. She had walked to the mouth of Pamet; and she came back alone, not hurrying, for it would take the white sloop till afternoon to come around the point by Highland light. The rose-trellis quivered in the gusts of wind that eddied over the sand-hills' crest, still smoking with the cold, salt spray, and fell to

quiet in the little hollow. Barbara lifted tenderly, and tied back, a vine or two that had broken from the lattice. Then she went in, and busied herself preparing her simple dinner, less simple, though, to-day, for the supplies the sloop had brought.

With Jethro she had walked, through the woods, to the little harbor; he would sail, resisting her entreaties to stay, or, at least, to go back direct across the safer bay; he hated the curious eyes at Sandwich. He never would stay; in all the twenty years they had been together, since first his mere passion had turned to love, he never had been with her through the day. She sighed. He cared far more for her reputation than she did herself. What was her reputation? She had sacrificed her life—lived for twenty years like a hunted animal, venturing abroad but at night, or in

lonely places, and all for love of this man. For him, in her budding womanhood, she had foresworn the sun. At first, she had tried living in Boston, but that was too far. So he had given her the cottage in South Dennis, where she lived, hidden; but, for summers, he had built for her a refuge in this more distant spot. In Pamet, at least, she could walk abroad alone. She did not have to pretend to be bedridden. And he could have stayed with her. For what was her reputation? Her life had been lived.

Here, her nearest neighbors were a settlement of Portuguese; they did not trouble her. She liked the freedom, the remoteness of Pamet. But, after all, winter was better, when she saw Jethro twice a day. Mornings, he came to bring her food and water; evenings, to cut and carry in her wood, and see

that she was well for the night. At Pamet, he came but once or twice a week; fearing the too frequent trips on the train, he had built the white sloop; in it, too, he took her down, when the warm weather came and she could safely be left alone—for she had no neighbor at either place whom she dared call on for help. The old glass-works at Sandwich were a safe trysting-place. The doctor was the only other man that had seen her in the twenty years—the doctor and the priest. It was Jethro's dearest wish that her name should be unscathed; hence the trouble of mailing letters from Chicago, the story of her life there, of her marriage. In the autumn, again, he took her back to the silent house in the cedar-woods of Dennis.

Still, she was beautiful; at forty-five she had not yet a wrinkle nor a silver hair. She looked like one that had been

always happy. The room bore marks of refinement; many books were there, a pile of sketches that showed no little untrained talent. An Italian grammar lay open on the table; she liked to read the old romances, dealing with times that were kinder to such lives as hers. She had never cared to see another man than Jethro, and for twenty years he had not looked upon another woman than herself. Perhaps it was that she was afraid to meet the old neighbors; or, rather, scorned to. A child when she vanished, she knew nothing of life, as they understood it. Her life was sufficient unto her.

After dinner she took his picture from a frame and kissed it. Then her eye fell upon the clock. She had worn a pretty summer-gown for his arrival; and she hurriedly threw a wrap about her shoulders. Going out, she locked

the cottage-door, and took the upward path.

The moment she reached the ridge of the high bluff she staggered with the force of the wind. It was a "dry" north-easter; still no rain, but the copper-gray clouds were rolling low, and the ocean, far beneath her, was seen in gaps through the rifts of spray. Far off, the sea was yeasty over Peaked Hill Bars. She looked for the white sloop, half hoping not to see it; it was not visible. Surely Jethro would have gone straight home in such a blow?

Bending down, and walking a rod below the summit, she walked northward along the shoulder of the cliff. Before she got to Pamet River light she saw the sloop. He had taken the inward passage, and was already sailing free, double-reefed, as she saw with her glass. She was glad of that.

Bracing herself, she stood a moment on the very highest point, and waved her veil. Promptly, she made out a speck of white at the sloop's stern. Then she turned southward and hurried fast, the wind behind her.

The beach below, seen through a mist of spray, was full of wreckage; and between the fall of the long rollers she could hear the grinding pebbles of the undertow. At this point it was not possible to scale the cliff, had she wished; though she might have descended in the sliding sand, she would not have got back. And nothing seaward could have been seen, at the spoondrift's level. She meant to walk as far as she could, in the woods, to Cross Hill or Cahoon Hollow; she had often done it before, but she had to hurry to keep pace, for the sloop was gaining fast. At the edge of the forest she turned

for a last waving of her veil, hoping still it might be visible against the sombre evergreen; then she plunged into the pitch-pine forest.

Here the winds were silent, and the June day still was June. She even picked a bunch of lady-slippers, wishing she could have him with her, hoping at least that he was dry, or had his oilskins on. She had no thought of danger to him—he had made the voyage too often—but hurried that she might come out into the open before he passed by. The little path was hardly visible in the dense pitch-pine. Now and then it dropped into deep dells, dark already, where no wind had ever been. The walk of a few miles was nothing to her; she hurried faster; it might be a week before he could come again.

Like all lonely persons, Barbara was observant of natural objects. The

woodpath was familiar; but, coming down to the hollow of Sheep Pond, she was startled to see its still surface covered with sea-gulls. And even through the pitch-pine, close as box, and over the high hills that separated her from the ocean, she heard the roaring of the surf.

Her heart beat higher and she climbed the opposite hill; soon the woods would end, and she wished to get out of them before the sloop passed by. He would be able to stand in closer, too, beyond the shoals. The open country began again six miles from home; this was to mark the limit of her walk. But, before the trees were even scattered, the force of the wind dismayed her. It had hauled to the southeast, nearly ahead, and she paused, clinging to the last tree, to get her breath. Anxiously, she looked for

the white sloop, with a moment of alarm at not seeing it. But, upon carefully sweeping the ocean, she made it out, hardly yet abreast of her. The wind had shifted so nearly ahead that Jethro had to sail close-hauled, and the cross-sea checked his way.

In a moment Barbara saw that his position was perilous. The coast hardly curves in the forty miles, and if the wind shifted one point more the sloop must go ashore or be put about to sea. There was no harbor short of Chatham for the smallest boat; Nausett was a shallow inlet, athwart which pounded the fiercest breakers of the coast; two miles this side there was a life-saving station, but they would never put out for one man in a pleasure-boat. She wished that she could gesture to him to go back; it was a quicker run, at least, as far as Race Point. After that the

sea, in the bay, would not be so terrible.

For Barbara saw it was a terrible sea. It was that worst kind which precedes the blow rather than follows it; though it blew a gale already. Great pebbles were hurled in her face from the beach, a hundred feet below. She wondered if he saw her yet. His bowsprit, heading the sea, was buried in every roller. He was too near the shore, the waves broke worse in the shallow water.

The sloop was gaining on her, though, and Barbara tried to run. She determined to follow him, to the inlet, if possible. Perhaps, with his seamanship, he might get in there, if it was too late to turn.

It was just the most unfrequented part of the coast. Cahoon Hollow lay behind; Nausett lights were scarce five miles ahead. The little boat, able in

almost any kind of a sea, that might have scudded or sailed free before any wind, was unsuited to facing just the sea that she was getting. Jethro had been forced in too far, and the waves, hollow-crested, buried the bows before the sloop could rise to them.

Barbara suddenly cried out aloud. The sloop was now scarce a mile away; and as she rose from one deep-surging wave, the bowsprit had snapped short off, and the jib was hanging. Instantly the sloop fell away, and pointed toward the beach.

Without a moment's hesitation Barbara plunged down the bluff. Great loads of sand gave way at each step and slid down with her. The scanty spears of beach-grass gave no hold nor holding; she fell and slid in a few seconds to the beach, a small avalanche of the cliff behind her.

Fortunately, the tide was low; but the driving spray filled the beach to the cliff, and the flying pebbles made it impossible to face the blast continuously. Creeping along by the shelter of an old wreck, and hanging to its ribs, she waited for a lull. The wind still came by gusts; and in the lull between them she could make out the white sloop. Jethro was forward, cutting or chopping at the bitts; she could see that the jib and jibboom wreck was still dragging to leeward, and the sloop was almost headed backward along the beach. Barbara shouted and let go her shawl; Jethro seemed to see her, for, when the last cut severed the wreck and the bows sprang up, relieved of the drag, he darted back and put the helm up until the sloop was headed for the place where Barbara was standing.

Barbara was on her knees at the water's edge, screaming. Jethro would not luff, though she saw him wave his hand; he was driving her to the shore. In a second the little craft stopped short, in a cloud of spray; Barbara even heard the crash as the mast went out of her; and she screamed again as a combing wave went over the vessel's stern. But when it rolled over, Jethro was still there, lying in the standing-room and holding himself hard beneath the seat. Lightened again, the sloop came in a wave's breadth farther; he sprang forward with a coil of rope in his hand. At the same moment that she crashed in, broadside with another breaker, he whirled the line to leeward, and Barbara understood.

As the line whipped across her breast, she seized it and wound it once

around her; as she fell down or was thrown, she dug her heels in the sand. The first shock came, and she turned upon her face, gripping the sharp rope beneath so that it passed across her shoulder and cut almost to the bone. But she had been dragged some yards down; she felt the spent wave touch her feet, and cared not, as she felt his weight and braced herself again. Then one more last agony, and the strain slackened suddenly; the water was around her, but she felt his arms, lifting her and carrying her out of danger. He drew her under the old wreck, and when she felt his kisses on her hair, on her wounded shoulder, she burst into a passion of tears.

XI

MRS. JETHRO BACON

IT was the next Sunday evening, and Mrs. Jethro Bacon sat alone in her house, reading the newspaper. Her husband had been away five days. For the last year or two he had never been absent more than two nights in succession. For the twenty years before that he had never been away more than one night. Mrs. Bacon was reading the maritime columns in the newspaper. She was looking particularly under the head of "disasters."

There had been a great storm about the Cape. Dozens of schooners, of barges, had gone ashore, off Monomoy, off Chatham. No mention was there of the Peaked Hill Bars. The Peaked Hill Bars vouchsafe no record of their

doings. She read of a collier that had been lost off Nausett. She read of a ship—an English ship—that had sunk to her topsail yards upon the Devil's Bridge; the men had tired, slowly, in the rigging, and dropped off, one by one; this had been seen from the shore. When at last the life-savers' crew got over from Tarpaulin Cove they found but two bodies in the rigging—a blond-bearded mate, without a coat, lashed skilfully and hard; in his arms a little girl of twelve, tied not so closely, for he held her fast; but about her, buttoned warm, was his pilot-coat that he had taken off, and in his gray and open eyes was still the look of love he last bent down to her, and now he holds her in his arms with God in heaven.

But Mrs. Bacon cared for none of these things; with all her heart she

hoped (she would have thought it irreligious to pray) that her husband might have perished too.

For her one wish now was that she might outlive him. That she, his injured wife, might outstay him here on earth, her greatest prayer. For then she could meet that other woman—sweeter almost that meeting here on earth than at the Judgment Seat. Moreover, she mistrusted God's mercy.

She did not blame Jethro. She hated him, but she did not blame him. The Puritan woman took a Catholic view of Cape male nature. But to her the thing was purely sensual—any man would do the same whose wife had lost her looks in five years after marriage. Yet she had been proud of her body, as a girl—before her figure had gone in the bearing of his children. No thought once crossed her mind that

anything was amiss with her soul, that any quality of heart or mind had won him from her. Easily, she might have found out who the woman was; but she did not dare. Of one thing she felt sure: the woman had no children.

The neighbors had come in once or twice that week; toward the end of it with increasing frequency. They made no reference to her husband, but she well knew what they thought. It is not etiquette upon the Cape to show anxiety until the widow does; but she dared not yet put on a weed of mourning. Yet the Captain, two nights before the great storm, had been seen off Monomoy. That was as far as their acquaintance went. One thing she had done; she had written to her boys, and they had come to her; Jeth crestfallen and sheepish, for old man Costello had

died, and he had lost his place, and Almira Bearse had been divorced and failed to marry him, after all, but had gone, with her money, to a third man still; Seth, fresh from some vague, much-boasted depth of sport or drama; and she was keeping open house. Open house, for them; and that night the neighbors had been bidden, that she might show them off. Aunt Mercy had come, and Mr. and Mrs. Sampson, the Thachers, Brewsters, Nickersons, poor Nora Howes. For, poor as young Jeth was, it still gave the mother some pleasure to show him to a woman who could love him still. Yet the loan of Nora's savings had been carefully, if slowly, repaid; and there was tea and chocolate upon the table, and the two boys had beer, possibly whiskey, in the woodshed, unbeknownst to Mrs. Bacon though bought with her money. The

neighbors, as they sat there, thought that she would be a rich woman now, the more as they suspected her of saving. It is not unusual for Yankee and French country people to save from their husbands.

The chocolate cake was thought almost indecent of her. The tea was well enough, and to have her two sons home with her; but money should first be spent on the funeral; then, perhaps, on painting the house; only slowly, gradually, on creature comforts. Skipper Sears, after much nudging from his wife, was irritated by it to a piece of news.

"Was down ter Wellfleet yesterday," he drawled.

Mrs. Bacon sat absolutely silent.

"Saw Lijah Bangs. You know he's a-clerkin' of it in the ho-tel there."

"Well? well?" said one or two, as

Sears showed signs of stopping at this point.

"He vowed he met the Capt'n in the woods down there, and he allowed as he was pickin' mayflowers."

"Mayflowers, this time o' year!" said comely Mrs. Sampson.

"That ain't all. I dunnow when the mayflowers might a been. But he says —Lijah says—as how the Capt'n stood out Wellfleet Harbor that night before the storm, close-hauled, and the wind No'th-east."

This time he made his effect. Not a woman in the room but knew that this meant "outen the Cape."

Mrs. Bacon's eyes flashed a moment, but she sat there grimly.

"He ain't never come in to Chatham."

"Nor Hyannis."

"Nor Hums's Hole."

"Wind fell to sowwestward after the storm," said Skipper Sears in criticism of the last possibility.

There was a ring at the door—the front door. Everybody started.

The front door had not possibly been opened since their first baby died. Everybody sat spellbound, even for a moment or two Mrs. Bacon.

"Go to the door, can't you?" said she at last, to young Jeth.

It was a piece of work, opening the front door. It was bolted and barred, and locked, and the carpet was in the crack. Yet none of the neighbors presumed to help. At last, when Jeth opened it, there was no one there. An envelope fluttered to the floor. Mrs. Bacon picked it up, adjusted her glasses, and read it to herself slowly.

"It's from Captain Bacon," she said.

"Says he's been stranded. He will be home next week."

Hastily the neighbors got up to go.

"Where did you say, where 'twas from?" said one, more indiscreet than the rest.

"I didn't say where 'twas from," said Mrs. Bacon. "And the next time you come to a funeral, be ye sure there's a corpse."

XII

BARBARA

THE winter's hand lay heavy on the Cape. Slowly the steel-gray sea had brightened to white ice in every bay or channel where the waters got rest. Even the sand was stiff, and the ruts were ringing hard. The deer came into the barn-yards; partridges and foxes grew tame, and there was skating on Barnstable Bay. Then there came a heavy fall of snow; nothing had been known to approach it since that storm seven years before, "the storm," as Sandwich people said, "the storm that Jethro Bacon had got wrecked in."

Jethro Bacon, the neighbors said, had aged considerably that year. Free of ailments all his life, his whole frame had suddenly been invaded by rheuma-

tism. It was thought a mistake that he still walked so much; it was felt to be time for even Captain Bacon to stay indoors and cower over a stove, winters, at least, as they did. But no neighbor ever criticised in Sandwich, even on that one fair subject of discussion, ailments. The Cape fairly revels in these, and has a new, complete system of treatment every ten years or so, "eclecticism," magnetic healers, osteopathy. Only Nora Howes, who was a Christian Scientist, ventured to speak to him of his rheumatism; she made light of the ailment, and told him to go on, as usual; so that Jethro soon professed himself a Christian Scientist, also.

Meantime, Mrs. Jethro watched him grimly. It was well known, now, that they lived apart, and did not speak. The roomy house invited, to such a life, their shrunken household. Jeth was in

the West; Seth had not come back of late; it was known that Mrs. Bacon sent them large sums of money. Each of the aged couple had now one side of the house, and they met, if at all, upon the staircase. Mrs. Bacon (any other Sandwich woman would by this time have been called Aunt Cynthy)—Mrs. Bacon had grown mean with years, and nobody ever took a meal with them. And it was known that the Captain was not master in his own house.

But she watched her husband. Every morning her face was at her bedroom window, watching him go out; and every evening at the "best parlor" window, watching his return. Sometimes, this winter, he had stayed away all day; but never for the night.

Then the heavy snow came, and he was later in returning. She would watch him, dourly, as he dragged his

aching limbs through the deep drifts. Sometimes he would arrive so exhausted that he could hardly drag himself up the steps, and would have to lie, breathless, with his wet boots on, too weak to remove them, or to get his tea; Cynthia Bacon never troubled herself to help him. But Jethro did his wife's chores now, since Seth had gone away. He was too poor to hire a man, even if he could have borne the prying eyes of a stranger. And the horse had been sold long since, for even his wife never wanted a carriage now; she had given up going to meeting; in fact, it was some years since she had been outdoors.

Henry Bearse was staying alone at home. Since his wife had gone across the line to Rhode Island, and got a divorce from him for non-support, and then remarried, nothing had been heard of her. It was rumored that

she was with Jeth again. Aunt Mercy Bearse was long since dead, and Henry had gone to live in the old house, much as a wounded animal goes to its hole. He was a voter, and could get his two dollars a day working on the roads for the town—when he wished to work. He had still some kind of a hold on young Jeth Bacon, and it was supposed that he paid him something, which ultimately came out of Mrs. Bacon's hoardings. For the Costello fortune had vanished when the old man died; and Jeth, wherever he was, had no visible means of support. Yet it was known that Bearse still hated all the Bacons.

One morning Henry Bearse was awakened by a knocking at his outer door. Such a thing had never happened before, and, before going down, he looked out of his bedroom window. A woman was standing at the porch.

Half fearing, half weakly hoping, that it might be his wife, he hurried down, and was infinitely more amazed to find that it was old Mrs. Bacon. Such a call could mean but one thing. He asked if the Captain was ill.

"Mr. Bacon is dead," said Mrs. Bacon. There was a glitter in her eye as she said it; she was dressed in her best, and looked ten years younger for the exertion she had made in walking over. Bearse stammered with a word of sympathy, but Mrs. Bacon interrupted.

"I want you to run to the village and get Ephraim Hallet's team. Him as keeps the poor-farm, and I want you to get Lizzie Amazeen, and bring her here—and you may get Nora Howes."

"Lizzie Amazeen! Here? not to the house?"

"I'll wait here. Mr. Bacon is not at the house."

"Not at——"

"Do as I bid you," answered Mrs. Bacon, impatiently.

"Oh, certainly—yes, of course, take a chair," said Henry, weakly, as Mrs. Bacon sat down in the kitchen. "Make yourself some tea."

"I don't want no tea—I've had my tea. An' the sooner you go, the sooner you'll get back."

What could Mrs. Bacon want of Mis' Amazeen at such a time? Lizzie Amazeen did not know, herself, but was willing enough to come back to see, as was poor Nora, though more flustered. After all, Captain Bacon was her Jethro's father. What did he die of? But Henry could not tell. The old man had been seeming feebler every day.

When they came back, Mrs. Bacon was sitting, grim and rigid, in the

kitchen. The women noticed that she already wore a black crape veil; it must have been prepared for the occasion. She spoke to them first.

"He went out yesterday morning, and he has never returned."

"Dear me," said Nora, "dear me! But, Mrs. Bacon, perhaps, after all— how do you know that he?——"

"I know that he is dead," said Cynthia Bacon, savagely.

Under Mrs. Bacon's guidance the four got into the wagon, Henry Bearse driving, Miss Amazeen with him on the front seat. Nora and Mrs. Bacon sat behind. No one spoke. At the fork of the roads it was Mrs. Bacon who indicated the turn we are familiar with, by the old town-house, and the second turn through the cedar-swamp, to South Dennis. No one of the others had ever been that way before. When

they came to the wooden cottage we know of, she bade them stop. The drifts lay heavy across the front door, and frosting was on all the window-panes. In all the lower windows the shutters were closed. There were no shutters in the upper story, but the blinds were closed, save in one room; no smoke came from the chimneys; the house looked uninhabited. But Lizzie Amazeen noticed that there was a sort of path, at least a line of footprints, cut through the snow from the street to the rear door and the wood-yard.

"Stop here," said Mrs. Bacon. "Henry Bearse, you stay with the horses. No use trying the front door, Nora. Miss Amazeen, you come with me."

Mrs. Bacon entered the yard with the air of an owner; yet it was evident that she had never been there before, as her first path but took her to a wood-shed,

with cut wood neatly piled. Then she came to the back door, and loudly knocked, Lizzie and Nora following, in silent wonder.

There was no reply.

She knocked again, and threw her weight against the door. It opened with a jar, and they heard a voice from the upper room, asking who they were. It was a woman's voice; and Lizzie started. "You go up first, Miss Amazeen," said Mrs. Bacon.

Lizzie went up the narrow stairs. The house was cold, and a ripple of blown snow still lay across the kitchen floor.

The others waited. They heard Lizzie Amazeen open a door; then they heard a scream. "Barbara!"

Nora started in amazement; but Mrs. Bacon's face remained impassive. Perhaps there was a shade of triumph

in it. They heard hurried voices in the upper rooms. Then Mrs. Bacon went up, too.

Nora followed Mrs. Bacon up the stairs. It was a large room, with a stove, but very cold; the fire had gone out. On the bed was lying Jethro Bacon, and she could see that he was dead. The body was heaped with shawls and clothing, and by the bedside sat a woman, chafing his hands. Nora recognized the woman of the dunes.

XIII

FATHER RYAN

LIZZIE AMAZEEN had fallen at her feet, and was kissing her through her own tears; fondling her, as if the woman of fifty years had been a child, crying, softly, "Barbara! Barbara!"

Mrs. Bacon did not sit down, but walked to the foot of the bed, where she stood, looking on her husband's face.

The woman (and Nora saw that she was still beautiful) sat silent, holding the dead man's hand. Suddenly, Mrs. Bacon stepped forward, seized her two wrists, and whipped them away.

"I have come for him," she said.

Barbara tried to rise; but Nora saw that she was too feeble. She sank back

into her sister's arms, or she would have fallen; Lizzie seized her two wrists and kissed them. The dead man's eyes were closed.

"He is my husband," said Mrs. Bacon.

Lizzie Amazeen rose to her feet, one hand upon her sister's shoulder. "You call him your husband!" Her eyes flashed fire. "You, who could not keep him; you, who never loved him! You had his house, and his name, and his money, to spoil your children with; and she for thirty years has had—just *him!* For him she gave up the world, and the life, and the light of day—hid herself, as if she were ashamed—and because she loved him! Would you have done that? And for thirty years, morning and night, rain or shine, sun or storm, he has come to her—walked to this house and back, twice a day, in

his youth and in his old age, to bring her food, to cut her wood, to carry her water from the well—had he even not come for two days, she would have starved—as she is starving now, that he is dead. Would he have done that for you?"

The flow of Lizzie's tirade was so volcanic that Mrs. Bacon stood as if stunned. Her under-jaw dropped, showing the unnatural rows of even teeth. Nora Howes was shocked, but far too timid to speak. Only Barbara said a word, and that was but "Lizzie, Lizzie!" She was crying, softly. It seemed as if she felt no bitterness against Cynthia Bacon; which only gave point to Lizzie Amazeen's next words:

"You may take him, now that he is dead. But Barbara has had his life."

Then Mrs. Bacon began to scold.

"You, you—how dare you speak to me like this, you—you poor-house woman! And all this time the fine doings we heard of her there in Chicago! And the moneys that she sent to keep you—they were mine, *mine*, I tell you! And this house is mine, and out of it she bundles—to the poor-house, you and your fine sister! and he——"

Mrs. Bacon bent over the bed, and removed the shawl that covered her husband's body. With a sort of low, moaning cry, Barbara threw herself upon it, and buried her face. "Oh, no—no—not so—" And even Nora dared to speak. For decency's sake she interceded, hushing Lizzie Amazeen, promising they would go. But this Mrs. Bacon flatly refused to do if that woman, Lizzie Amazeen, were to stay behind. She wished even to carry Barbara away. But this was im-

possible; the almshouse people had to be seen, the undertaker. Finally, it was arranged that Nora was to stay with Barbara, with *him*.

Henry Bearse was called to. After a whispered talk with Nora, he brought up some wood; and she at once began to busy herself with the fire.

Reluctantly, the widow came away; it was clear enough that only the triumph of clearing the house of Barbara that night reconciled her to it. She sat with Bearse upon the front seat, Lizzie Amazeen behind; so the ill-matched trio drove away, while Nora Howes was left, stroking Barbara's soft hair.

Early in the afternoon they returned. In the covered wagon were Mrs. Bacon, the superintendent of the poorhouse, the undertaker, and Lizzie Amazeen. She was allowed to come back to take her sister, on the insistence of

the pauper authorities, against Mrs. Bacon's will. The storm had cleared to bitter cold; the sun was setting brightly.

"I kept my bargain," Mrs. Bacon was heard to murmur. "It was longer than I thought, but I kept my bargain. If I hadn't, he'd have gone with her. And now, I'll take her to the poor-house!"

Hallet told afterward that the old woman "kind o' gloated;" "I'll take his body to my house—the poor-house is good enough for her!"

But on the threshold of the silent house they were met by Father Ryan. Barbara had taken the last sacrament, and he would not have her moved. Lizzie and Nora were with her through the night, and before morning she, too, was dead.

Father Ryan had with him a paper

of many years' date. It was a writing signed by Jethro Bacon, to the effect that he was to be buried in the Catholic Cemetery. He had long been a Catholic, said Father Ryan.

Barbara was buried there, too, not very far away. But Mrs. Bacon went to live in the house upon the Dennis road.

THE WEAKER SEX

A Paper in the Pigeon-hole of the District Attorney

"Wyves been bestès very unstable
In ther desires, which may not chaunged be,
Like a swalowe which is insaciable,
Like perilous caribeis of the troublè see."

The Payne & Sorowe of Euyll Maryage.

THE WEAKER SEX

"MILTON wrote 'Paradise Lost' to 'justify the ways of God to men,'" said Jack. "No one yet has ventured on an epic to justify the ways to them of women."

"The ways of a young man with a maid, sang the Psalmist."

"Psalmist? It's Job. But never the ways of the maid to him."

"Yet the subject was not unworthy his attention," rejoined the District Attorney. "For instance, the ways to a man of his wife."

"Burton has an Arabian tale on that."

"Perhaps; but Christian literature on the subject is lacking."

"It is cheaper to take the lighter

view," said Jack. "Francis the First led off with his *souvent femme varie*."

"*Femme* there is woman, not wife," said the District Attorney. "At best, it is window-pane literature."

"Then take an older authority—English, this time"—and Jack quoted the motto at the head of our tale. "There the word is 'wyfe.'"

"And the man was a wittol," growled the District Attorney. "Talk is cheap; had he given affection——"

"Men are full of affection; that's why they don't get married."

"In your class, perhaps, economic independence turns the women's heads—from matrimony. But in the class I see——"

Here Jack's wife had to interrupt; her husband's last speech left too strong a scent for any woman not to follow.

"Affection!" she sniffed. "Yes, for

too many. Or, if he has it before marriage," she cried, doubling her speed as Jack showed signs of overtaking, "he drops it with the ceremony! He has her then, and counts upon her loving him ever afterward—which, I am bound to say, she usually does," Jack's wife, with a sudden drop to a walk, ruefully ended.

Jack grinned. His wife was nothing if not honest; and if she rather rushed her fences, she told honestly what she found upon the other side.

The District Attorney interfered: "I could tell you a tale about that——"

"Oh, do!" said Jack's wife.

I

IT was many years ago, when I was only the Assistant. You have seen complaints in the newspapers about the evil practice of our office in pigeonholing indictments, complaints. This is the history of a pigeon-holed complaint.

In those days I was interested in one of the earliest attempts to establish outposts of civilization in the slums. Some young men were in residence in a house we had hired for this purpose. We were very proud of the map we had prepared of the neighborhood. It hung in the private sanctum of the head brother, and depicted, on the scale of one inch to the hundred feet, the vice and crime of our environment. Our knowledge of this part of Boston was "extensive," if not

"peculiar;" for the only tangible result of our first three months was, perhaps, this chart. Barrooms on it were colored red; other houses of entertainment yellow; and the tenements of the criminal or vicious poor were black. Any house against which, or its inmates, nothing had been proven was gray; but the gray spots on the map were few and far between, and the only white ones were the police-station, the society of St. Vincent de Paul's, and ourselves. In fact, the map looked like the Kaiser's dream of an imperial German flag, all red and black and yellow.

One bitterly cold night I started late for home. We had been holding one of our classes, and I had assigned the parts and heard Macbeth read aloud from end to end by Russian Jews. They were far and away the most artistic class we had, and understood Shake-

speare much better than our native-born.

It was too cold to walk across the damp and dusty marsh that runs from the Neck to the Back Bay of Boston, in the teeth of that awful wind. A close student of the American climate, I was well aware of what had happened: the atmosphere, which protects the earth like a blanket from the cold of interstellar space, had been drawn away to a storm-centre south of us, and the empyrean had dropped through into the resulting vacuum. The empyrean is absolute cold. To-night it was a furious cold wind; to-morrow it would be colder still, without the wind; on the third day the vapor would be slowly restored from the west and south, like the bedclothes over a shivering sinner, and our rasped membranes would have a rest.

To-night it was too cold to face the blast that blew down from the unwarmed zenith like a forced draft, and I waited on the corner for a car. "Shiner" Dempsey's saloon was on that corner—a not unfriendly person, who evidently did not fear that the higher life we were inculcating would appreciably diminish his receipts; called "Shiner" for the freshly ironed "topper" he wore outside of business hours. His business hours were long, as he worked for himself, being from about noon till after midnight; but on Sundays he got away, by force of the law he much complained of. "Sure 'tis better a man come in here openly and take a load he can carry, than rush a growler home o' Saturday nights fit to blind-drunk the whole flat up to Monday. It is not that I'm after ray-tail rates; for the bottle trade buys that more than makes the differ-

ence." Thus would Shiner Dempsey reason with us afterward, when we knew him better. It was on that night I made his acquaintance.

For the car that plies from the slums to Beacon Street runs on a very uncertain half hour, and I was driven to shelter in Dempsey's saloon, as many a poor man has been before me. There were three men drinking at one end of the high bar, and Dempsey (or the barkeeper, as I then knew him) gave the cherry shelf a wipe with his napkin in my direction, and looked at me inquisitively before throwing it aside. I told him whiskey; and even while he was pouring it out I noticed the noisy behavior of the three other men. There was one fellow with a slouchy air veneered with cheap bravado; and then there were two ineffable cutthroats of the accepted stage variety drinking with him. The sur-

prising thing was that he seemed to be drinking at their expense.

Dempsey's whiskey was not so bad, with plenty of soda. I finished my own drink, and went to the window, hoping any car would come while it kept my chill away. The car was invariably late on cold nights when you shivered waiting for it, and early on hot nights when you had to run for it. A loud dispute turned me back from the window.

"Have a drink—I tell 'ee, have a drink. Dempsey good—hic—feller, Dempsey have a drink."

With the cynical shrug of one who discharges his own conscience, the barkeeper poured a very little whiskey for himself, and shoved the bottle to his drunken guest, who helped himself liberally enough to bring up the average, and shoved it on to his cutthroat companions.

Just then the door opened. I was struck with a sudden shrinkage in the man beside me. Following his eye, I was startled; so, I think, was Dempsey; the jaws of the two cutthroats fell. With the cold blast from the street there came a woman, clad in black, with only a thin black shawl wrapped about her decent, well-worn dress. I just saw that she was fine and straight and sad, while she walked, like a Juno, straight to the bar, straight to the drunken man, and put her hand upon his arm. He seemed shorter than she, as he cowered, and set down his glass untasted. The two cutthroats began to bluster.

She did not deign to look at them, but only at her husband. She was pale, but she looked at him with all her eyes And by Heaven, if I could see once such a look in a woman's eyes for me, I would [the District Attorney was a bachelor]

—I would ask any woman that had it to marry me! But it only comes after marriage, and you can't tell. Well, my heart gave the leap that any man's does when he meets such a soul; and as the cutthroats seemed inclined to make trouble for her, I looked at the barkeeper. At the same moment Dempsey took his eyes from her, and looked at me.

"Come, Elmer," said the woman.

"Come, Elmer," mocked the first cutthroat. "Come home to his missus. Christ! be a man, Wentworth, and take another drink!"

Elmer hesitated.

"Perhaps the missus 'ull take a drink herself," said the other cutthroat, with a leer.

It was an error of judgment. Wentworth straightened himself, as the woman's white hand quivered slightly on his arm—straightened himself slowly,

pulled himself together to look a moment at the cutthroat who had spoken last. Then he turned to the woman. "This is no place for you," he said. And picking up his overcoat from a chair he put it on, she helping him.

There was a pile of hogsheads opposite the end of Dempsey's bar, that served to partially screen the inmates from the streets. In the recess that it made the cutthroats had been standing, but now one of them took a step toward the door. At the same moment Dempsey lifted the hinged end of his bar, and stepped out alongside of me. Thus we two stood across the egress from the recess formed by the pile of casks, and between Wentworth's two friends and his wife. All this time not a word was said; she touched his arm again and he slipped by us and followed her.

We all looked in silence after them. As she opened the door, her husband was not too drunk to draw the thin black shawl around her neck, though we could see that she was supporting him, as they turned the corner by the street-lamp.

When they ceased to be seen through the window, the first cutthroat burst into an uneasy laugh, but the one who spoke last made as if to follow them. Dempsey interposed his hand.

"Let's see where the damned scab lives!"

"You owe for four drinks," said Dempsey, quietly. The cutthroat looked at us; but we were both large men. The paying took some time.

When they were gone, Dempsey turned to me. "Much obliged to you, sir. Have a drink on it. Better not go out just yet, sir."

"Do you often have such trouble?" I asked, as I accepted his courtesy.

"Not often. Generally they're not worth it. But she— Those two were a bad lot."

"Do you know her?" I asked again.

Dempsey looked at me with a shade of suspicion.

"Never saw her before. But he— he often comes here. I can't help selling him liquor. At least, I couldn't——"

I shook his hand. "Good-night, Mr. Dempsey," said I. "I belong to Groton House, just round the corner."

"Good-night, sir. There comes your car; better take it. I don't know them, but they're a bad lot." And I left Dempsey putting up his shutters.

II

THAT night I got home safely, but some mysterious attraction brought me back to Groton House the next night. Or, no, it was not mysterious; it was the attraction of that poor woman's personality. And by that I don't mean face and figure, or even her expression and her eyes, or even voice and manner. It is cheap to grin at a man for recognizing a noble soul, because that soul is a woman's. Yes, Mrs. Jack (I fear that Mrs. Jack had smiled); and no one knows better than an old prosecuting attorney that we do see noble souls, men's or women's, clothing faces. Mere prettiness will hide any youthful soul; but a face of thirty or forty is a telltale thing.

Well, I went down to Groton

House the next night, and told my tale at dinner over the pie. Pie was our second and last course, and brought the talking hour, like ices and cigars with us. Being men, they did not take so light a view as you did, ma'am; but all agreed that they had met with no such woman. The man was harder to individualize; just a weak, average, vain young countryman.

"Looked as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, did he?" said the Skipper.

Now the "Skipper" was one of us —perhaps the most successful. So called because he had made a three years' voyage as second mate of an American bark manned by Norwegians and Lascars; and he had seen his chief officer ripped up from groin to breastbone by a "dago" boatswain, in the harbor of Rio. After chucking the

dago overboard, to save expense and demurrage, he had become first officer and navigated the ship back to Boston, where he became a clergyman of the extremest High Church order. But though he had a secret chapel in his closet, none of the neighbors mistrusted his profession: he had a roll in his walk, wore a straw hat in winter, and was known to Cheese-it Alley as the "Skipper." No sign of the cloth was about him, the hair shirt underneath the flannel one being invisible. And he was said to be the only soul, policemen included, that dared walk through Cheese-it Alley after dark. Hence it had become his favorite haunt: he went there on his vacations, Saturday afternoons, to see the sport begin; and on Sunday morning they called him in to patch up the family rows and arrange for hospital service.

"I saw a chap like that up Cheese-it Alley," the Skipper went on.

"Oh, of course," said the Rev. Septimus Brand. (He was a Unitarian.) "Everything happens in Cheese-it Alley."

"Well, it does," retorted Barstow. (The Skipper's name was Barstow.) "Everything happens in the alley. We had a marriage there to-day. I did it. Father Nolan funked the job."

"You mean he was afraid to go there in broad daylight?"

"No, no—bless his heart, no—nor night-time either. Didn't feel quite sure of his principals. I risked it."

"As justice of the peace?"

"They thought so. Oh, I read the service; they know I'm a kind of sea parson. Who was your man with?"

I described the two cutthroats as best as I could.

"My word, I believe I know that outfit. Regular conventional stage villains, and he the virtuous youth astray. Never saw the wife, though. You're sure she *was* his wife?" This to me, sharply.

"I'll swear it," I replied.

"Well, well, don't get in a wax. They usually aren't, you know," said the Rev. Barstow. "Anyhow, there's no such woman in Cheese-it Alley—or on earth," the Skipper closed. "She was a vision in Dempsey's barroom."

"So you would advise us to——"

"Think no more of her. You may minister to the fallen; but all other frequentation with that sex is incompatible with the higher light. St. Thomas à——"

"Hang St. Thomas à Kempis!" said I. "He knew nothing of the subject. We could help that woman,

strong and fine as she is—help her to save her husband."

"No man ever tried to save a woman but lost his own soul," dogmatized the Skipper. "I never interfere between husband and wife——"

"Please, sir, do come to mother. Popper's got her down, and 'e's a-beatin' of her dreadful." The door (we were back in the front room by this time) had opened while we were discussing, and it was a child of nine who spoke—blue-eyed, freckle-faced, barefooted but for a pair of old slippers, the falling snow upon her hair. The Skipper grabbed his hat amid the general laughter, and I followed.

"Family's English," said Barstow to me. "Only three English families in the alley; good class, but they will beat their wives. Now tell me about your men. Both American: dyed mustache

on one, other blond and pink-necked—too well dressed for the neighborhood—blond a Yankee, New York finish? Lead on, Mary!"

I nodded.

"Wait a bit till I fix up Mary's mother's case. Her man must have stopped halfway for want of money. They're next door, but they don't live there—just wait here." We were already in the alley. "In the entry, you tenderfoot." I slouched in the dark entry while the Skipper and Mary ran upstairs. "It's all right; she's still talking. I won't be long."

Talking she was, and so was he, and there were occasional other voices. I confess I passed my time inventing excuses to the proprietors of Cheese-it Alley flats for my presence there. They seemed, however, to pay no attention to what was going on above me; and in a

moment the voices ceased, and the Rev. Barstow reappeared with a heavy Lancashireman, evidently Mary's popper.

"You go down to Shiner Dempsey's, and he'll give you one more drink. Then don't you dare come home until you're sober." The fellow slunk off. "Case of necessity," said the Skipper to my look of inquiry. "Like a dose of morphine. He's really dangerous at this stage. Stop a moment, though; his fighting mood may come in handy. —John Dene, this man wants to see a friend. That friend is the young fellow down with two men in that basement next door. You go down and tell him his wife wants him."

It was easy to see the ascendency Barstow had established over Cheese-it Alley. His orders would have appeared vague to a sober man. But John Dene half-touched his hat, and plunged down

a greasy cellar stairway. Halfway down he tripped and fell, apparently, and broke open a door, for we heard a crashing of wood. "Now," said the Skipper, "you watch and see if that's your man. Stand back there, in the dark."

We heard loud swearing from below. "Suppose he don't come?" said I.

"They'll let him come all right; they don't want a row, and people rushing in on *their* business, I suspect." And sure enough, we heard a low voice in argument with the swearer.

"Can't you see he's drunk? Get him out of here—let Wentworth go." A hoarse roar and a bang followed; John Dene was getting in his work. The man I had seen in Shiner Dempsey's ran upstairs, and I gripped the Skipper's arm.

"Mr. Wentworth?" said the Skipper. "Your wife wants you. Mr.

Lane—Mr. Lane, Mr. Wentworth. Mr. Lane is a lawyer; but he didn't quite know his way about the alley, so I came with him. Lane'll go back with you. (Make your story up as you go; you're properly introduced.)"

The last words were an aside to me. I looked at Wentworth, and he recognized me. "She isn't sick, is she?"

A voice below saved me the trouble of replying, and I turned to the Skipper. "But what'll you do?"

"Rather think I've got to see John Dene through. I want to get my eye on the two men's game," he whispered. "Tell her simply you came to get him away from them."

Wentworth and I walked off, and Barstow plunged down the stairway. The audible appearances were that John Dene was having it all his own way.

III

WENTWORTH was a young fellow, slender, small-boned, freckle-faced, with something of the air of the country dandy about him. He did not look as if brought up on a farm, but rather as one who has worn a black coat over his shirt-sleeves, done his work behind a desk, and for sport gone buggy-riding of a Sunday. His face was bright enough, with delicate black mustache, and fine if rather furtive brown eyes. I deemed it best to meet the coming question.

"I don't think Mrs. Wentworth is ill," I said. "I saw you the other night at Shiner Dempsey's."

"I remember. I was a bit shiney myself," he answered, civilly, with a smile a woman might have called attrac-

tive. "And you—" Suddenly his face changed. "Did she tell you? Did she say where I was? Damn her! I'll fix her."

Anyone who had seen the two together might have doubted the possibility of his fixing her; but I hastened to reply: "Your wife had nothing to do with it. Do you know who those two men are?" This was a random shot, but it evidently took effect.

"They're friends of mine — that should be enough for you, and her, too. Who are you, anyway?"

I drew my card-case, and gave him my card; and this act seemed to mollify him. With a flourish he produced a card in exchange. It bore the legend, "Elmer H. Wentworth, First National Bank, Claremont, N. H."

"I've left the bank," he said, as he saw me read it. "Dead little hole. But

it gave me considerable knowledge of financial affairs in that section. I am looking for a city position; and I don't mind telling you I've had devilish hard work getting one."

"I'm a member of Groton House; college settlement, you know." He looked at me blankly. "Our men there were surprised at seeing people like yourself and your wife in this part of the town."

"Beggars mustn't be choosers," said the young man, as if in jest. "But stop in at Shiner's and have a drink with me."

He had evidently not been drinking yet, and I saw no way to refuse without leaving him. I confess I had too much interest in Mrs. Wentworth to do that so soon. Moreover, the Skipper had dropped a hint about the two men. Wentworth took his whiskey (I com-

promised on beer), and I could see it go to his nerves at once. Still we went on, apparently on the same footing.

"Have you any letters from the bank? I should gladly do what I can," I said, by way of filling up the time as we walked.

"No, I didn't ask for letters. I just left. But I know all the boys on the road."

We came to a poor, but decent-looking brick lodging-house; he led me up two flights of stairs, and entered, without knocking, a back room. I heard, though it was late in the evening, the whir of a sewing-machine. His wife rose, and looked at me in surprise; then I saw that she recognized me. She colored, and I felt his suspicions return.

"Did you tell this stranger where I was?" he asked angrily.

"I? No, no, Elmer," she repeated, earnestly. I interposed hastily.

"My friend Mr. Barstow—a clergyman—has duties in a place called Cheese-it Alley. I went there to-night, and we found Mr. Wentworth with two men we have every reason to be suspicious of. I ventured to come back to warn you both about them. That is all, with every apology for the intrusion."

"There, Elmer," said the wife, softly. She was still standing, her noble presence quite belittling the pretentious young man, despite his entire unconsciousness of inferiority. "I never liked that Sinclair and his friend."

"You never like my friends. What have your people done for me, I'd like to know? Ain't I got to earn our living?"

Mrs. Wentworth cast a half-glance

at the sewing-machine, and I felt convinced that, for the moment, the living came from it.

"I come from Groton House, where we are trying to help each other," I said. "I should like to write to Claremont about Mr. Wentworth, if he will let me. Meantime" (I saw the books upon the work-table), "perhaps you could help us by taking a reading and a sewing class there? We can afford to pay a little, a very little."

"No use writing to Claremont," put in the husband. "A fellow must stand on his own merits in this world."

"You know you are a beautiful bookkeeper, Elmer," said the wife, with a pathetic look of trying to be proud of him. "And I should like a little of the work for a change. Our sewing doesn't take much time, for only the two of us." Her inflection dropped as she

ended, and I knew that there had been a baby who had died.

Before I left them, it had been arranged that she should go to Groton House for two hours, three evenings in the week. The young man insisted on coming with me to my car, and talked to me with a show of eagerness of his skill at selling bonds, his acquaintance with New Hampshire saving banks, with country investors. Then I left him, and I fear he took another drink at Dempsey's.

Of course I wrote to the Claremont bank, and got the answer I expected. They had no charge to make against Mr. Wentworth, but had deemed it best to sever his connection with them. And I saw all the wearisome old story: the pretty country girl; the fascinating town bank clerk, with his buggy and his bright ways; the careless courtship and the care-

less marriage (on his part), followed by the lifelong devotion, so easily earned, so lightly prized. Nothing could be done for them in banking circles without a reference; but I searched for something else for him. And the Skipper and the Rev. Septimus looked after her.

IV

I AM not telling the story of their lives, so I must hasten on to the catastrophe. Winter waned, and the warm weather came on. We found no place for Wentworth, and he didn't seem to care. He began to talk grandiloquently of "going on the road." What line of enterprise this meant we could not see; but his wife was evidently in terror of it. Since John Dene's incursion the two cutthroats had moved—to some place more recondite, if not redder and yellower, than Cheese-it Alley; wherever it was, it was certainly off our map, for even Skipper Barstow had failed to find them. Barstow, as usual, had become the friend at hand to the Wentworth family; to him Mrs. Wentworth confided her fears,

and even her husband confided—his hopes and vainglory—as much confidence as he placed in anybody. But Barstow would not flatter him, and it was evident his other friends did; also, that they gave him to drink, for he came home often with his poor nerves crazed. At such times, if he found Barstow, he was abusive; whether more so when he found his wife alone we could not tell. She struggled bravely; but she showed the struggle in her eyes.

Shiner Dempsey was the man who helped us in the end. The cutthroats never came to drink in his saloon again; but, by the freemasonry of his trade, he was able to locate them—in the private room adjoining the bar of a political friend of his in South Boston. One night the Skipper came to the house, late to dinner, full of satisfaction at the

discovery. "This is in your line, Lane," he said to me. "It looks like they're green-goods men."

"Counterfeiters?" I said. "You mean they had their plant in Cheese-it Alley?"

"Perhaps not, though perhaps they did. They didn't seem to approve John Dene as a walking delegate. Perhaps they're only the first fence themselves. But it's evident they want your sleek friend Wentworth to be the last—to pass the money. He has a clerkly hand —perhaps to alter numbers. Yet I doubt if he's up to that. Perhaps he doesn't even know the game—only suspects it. But when he goes on the road, to sell bonds, what more likely than that he should pass a bill or two? Or he might even sell the original packages, to the people who would buy his bonds."

"Mrs. Wentworth is wild to get her husband into some occupation," I said. "She can read the men at sight, and knows they would use her husband for their tool. Her last proposition was to find for him some decent clerkship, at any pay, and arrange with the employer to increase it by what she can earn from her sewing-machine, to make the place seem worth her Elmer's while."

"You may be sure he has done something wrong; not much, but just enough to make him lose his place while leaving the matter hushed up. She feels the crisis in his life, and would give her eyes to get him on the rails again. And he is just the sort of fellow to make a dangerous criminal."

"Oh, come!" said the Rev. Septimus Brand. But Barstow only shook his head.

"I know the type—the nervous tem-

perament—Yankee quickness, lack of stomach or stamina. He could forge, defraud, commit a sudden murder—only nothing brutal. He would never beat his wife, like John Dene, though he might, I think, kill her."

"He's drinking hard; not, I believe, because he likes it, but to make the world look different," said Brand, with the air of one making a discovery. Barstow roared.

"And yet you let yourself out for a sky pilot! I prescribe one month's course of raw, red whiskey, between meals! Do you suppose men drink because they like the taste?"

"I do—I just love it," said I, out of feeling for the Rev. Septimus, who was blushing for his innocence. "And I'll bet John Dene does."

"Not men of the type of Wentworth, though. He is the degenerate aristo-

crat, all nerves and ganglia. I suppose that's what made her marry him. Lane, can't *you* do something? Can't we hand him over to the secular arm?"

"Hand who over?" said I.

"Him—or, rather, them—the two outdacious villains — the impenitent thieves. Can't you work the State police or something?"

"The State police know all about them. The trouble is to catch them doing something," said I, loftily.

"Oh, they do, do they? Then will you kindly find out where the pair are lodging?"

"I was just going to ask you that," said I. "If you find it out, I'll have a raid made."

"And have them out of the State. Much good would that do us!"

"Couldn't we then make the Wentworths stay here? Couldn't you tell

her enough to make her stay here? If I'm any judge of character"—I was then twenty-five—"he'll stay where his wife does."

The Skipper slapped his clerical leg and said I'd hit it. That I remember very well. We all agreed that the one thing was to separate him from them, and trust to Mrs. Wentworth's influence.

But the ways of Divine Providence were not then made known to the priest Barstow. Our only comfort afterward was from thinking that we were all in it, alike. Our action had commended itself to the wisest foresight of three intelligent men. Perhaps, after all, our action also was in the providence of God; though only John Barstow, priest, could think so, after the event.

V

THE Skipper went back the next evening to the dramshop in South Boston, accompanied by a small boy, an extraordinarily intelligent Russian Jew of eleven or twelve years, an acolyte of Cheese-it Alley. "I didn't like to set him spying on the sly," said Barstow, "so I told him frankly what he was there for. The end justifies the means, and we were trying to 'shake' two dangerous enemies of his dear friend Mrs. Wentworth. (You know, he goes to her reading-class, and he simply adores her.) Well, he did better than I dreamed. When they went home, he met 'em outside and pretended to be a beggar; that is, he asked for a drink."

"Did he take it?" "A pretty way

to ingratiate himself!" said I and Brand, simultaneously.

"That's where you're dead wrong. Oh, he took it all right," answered the Rev. Skipper, who was fond of slang. "They were delighted with the way he took it. And there's nothing so inspires a rascal's confidence as to make him think you're a rascal, too. You've observed that in your profession, Lane."

I admitted, but with dignity, that the rascally lawyer often found it easier to get clients. The vulgus confounds smartness with sharpness, trickiness with ability. How else do we find all the deserving poor mixed up with such shady attorneys?

"Well, they thought he was a peach, and let him go home with them. And in the cellar—well, I don't want to know too much, but I think, if you get the lad before your police, Lane,

they'll have grounds enough to make a raid." The Skipper was always anxious not to know too much; he had to learn plenty, as it was, but would no more "peach," after a thing was over and done, than a more Catholic confessor; his mission was to persuade, not to punish. "You'd better lose no time; see your people at once, with the boy. Meantime, I'll go round to Mrs. Wentworth and tell her to keep her husband at home to-morrow, at any cost."

This was done. The State police were more than ready, after hearing the boy's story, to make a raid at once. From his description they seemed to recognize the criminals; but they also appeared to be rather concerned for the boy's safety in case the two cutthroats were not duly locked up. They recommended that influence should be made to send him to our best State industrial

school; apparently also thinking the boy's talents too great to be wasted in a sweatshop. But Stepan pleaded against this stoutly. The family affection of the Russian Hebrew is very strong, but also, I suspect, the boy could not bear separation from his adored Mrs. Wentworth in the trouble he evidently felt was to be hers. So it ended by my promising to keep him safe in Groton House until the thing was over.

I was busily detained at the office until after six, that night, keeping Stepan with me; but then went instantly to Groton House, where I found things quiet enough, and we sat down to our dinner as usual. Barstow had not thought it wise to see the Wentworths on that day, as he had frankly told the wife that her husband's friends were probably counterfeiters, and were about to be "pulled" by the police. She

was coming to one of her classes in the evening; meantime, we could only wait and hope that she had kept her husband by her, for by that time all would be over.

At seven o'clock she appeared—earlier than usual—her worn face bearing witness to the distress of mind Mr. Wentworth caused. Barstow had cautioned her not to say anything that would tend to identify her with the coming *coup*. So she had had to plead illness, and rely solely on her powers of persuasion; and it was testimony to the affection her husband still bore for her that he had yielded to her entreaties on a day which he, too, seemed to have deemed of importance, for he had become (she told us) more and more nervously irritable as the day wore on. Several times she had to take his promise that he would go out but to

return in a moment; and each time, when he returned, he had evidently been drinking; and the last time, about nightfall, though he had given the promise, he had not come back at all. To calm the poor woman's anxiety, I promised to go at once to police headquarters (it was before the days of telephones) and find out what had occurred. Meanwhile, Mrs. Wentworth insisted, she would go on with her class; it would do her good.

"We nabbed 'em in the nick of time," said the inspector at the central station. "Goods was all packed, and they just about ready to go on the road. But there was only one of them the man we wanted. The other was a kind of a country swell—never met him before. *He* was rather a light weight, he was. We let *him* go."

"What was his name?" I asked

anxiously. Could Wentworth, after all, have got caught himself?

"Gave his name as Parker. Wa'n't his real name, o' course. Swore he didn't know anythin' about the goods. I don't know — there was some good bills among 'em. Anyhow, we let him go."

"What did you let him go for? What time was it?"

"Oh, we'll get him any time easy enough. We've only just got back."

It was Wentworth, without doubt; and he evidently had failed to inspire the experts with much respect for his powers as a criminal.

"Why did you wait so long?" I asked. "It was only two o'clock when you started."

"Well, we found the goods all right; but the shop was empty, and we thought we'd wait till the owners came to claim them," the inspector grinned.

"But we missed one barrel. It's just Bowery Dave and a tenderfoot; that's all he is—just a tenderfoot."

"What is your man like? Fat, blond, pink-necked—looks like a prosperous gambler?"

"That's the feller—sort o' Jim Fisk type—Dave Sinclair, well-known upper-class confidence man. Never knew him in anything so bad as this before."

"That's because you haven't got the worst of the two." And I described as best I could the individual with the dyed mustache.

"Was that the feller?" said the inspector, pulling out a photograph from his desk-drawer.

"Precisely."

"I might ha' known it. I—might—have—known it," repeated the inspector, with added emphasis. "And Mac's

been let in again. Where d's the other feller live, I wonder?"

"The dyed mustache? I don't —"

"Of course you don't. No, no; the tenderfoot, I mean. That's the place to find out first."

I hesitated a moment; then I spoke: "I think I know."

"You know? — Here, Charley!" The inspector rang a bell and spoke through a tube at his desk. "Put two men—Bryan and Johnson—no, MacCann—he'll be all the better for this job now—in the carriage, and say I'll be down directly. Now, Mr. Lane, come on. How d'you know it, though?"

I told him about our interest in Mrs. Wentworth, and, through her, in him. But I made two conditions before giving the address: one was that he should not rearrest Wentworth, who, I felt

sure, was not yet guilty; the other, that we should call at Groton House, on the way, and reassure his wife's mind. The inspector demurred to the second; I only wish he had insisted.

The two men got inside with us (the carriage must look like an ordinary carriage, explained the inspector), and I gave the driver the address of Groton House. I would not let them go in, but hurried in alone, only to find that Mrs. Wentworth had finished her class and gone home, anxious about her husband, Barstow escorting her. I ran down the steps, and made the inspector promise to keep his men concealed (unless the other cutthroat should be found actually in Wentworth's room), and himself to come in as my friend: to both which conditions he (rather petulantly, I thought) assented.

We stopped the carriage at the near-

est street-corner. (Mrs. Wentworth and Barstow had but just gone, they had told me at Groton House.) Then I led the inspector up the dark stairs of the Wentworth family's last poor home.

When we got to the second flight we heard Wentworth's voice, that of a drunken man, talking loudly, apparently rating his wife. There was no reply. Then, after a moment's waiting, a pistol-shot and a heavy fall of a body.

"That's murder!" said the inspector, as he dashed forward up the pitch-dark stairs.

VI

WE burst into the room almost together, the inspector of police and I. There was Wentworth, crazed with drink, one hand grasping the still smoking revolver, Barstow holding him tight under both arms, just too late. No one else was in the room.

Just too late; for on the floor lay his wife, with blood upon her breast, still breathing, but already unconscious. For a minute (it seemed an age) no one spoke; there was no sound but the hard breathing of the poor woman. Then the inspector stepped forward and laid his hand gravely on the man. "I arrest you for murder," he said.

Wentworth paid no attention to him; all his eyes were for the true wife who had loved him so, whom he had killed. It was terrible to see in his eyes the

false spirit leave him, the sober consciousness return. Suddenly he burst from Barstow's arms, and fell, in a storm of sobs, at her side. He tore the poor dress from her shoulder, seeking in vain to stanch the spot with his lips; slowly, pitilessly, the red drops came. "Stop," said the inspector. "Stop; you only make it worse. Come away, you"—he hurled Wentworth back roughly—"and thank your stars if you have not killed her, after all." He went to the window, threw it open, and whistled; in a moment the carriage dashed up. "Drive for the nearest surgeon—and drive like hell—one of you; the other come up with me."

We heard the carriage rattle off; the policeman came up the stairs, entered, started back as he saw her body. "It is a job of murder, not counterfeiting, to-night," said the inspector, briefly.

Barstow, the sobbing Wentworth assisting, tried to lift her to a lounge. "Leave her where she is — leave her where she is," ordered the inspector. "Until the doctor comes"—this to Barstow, demurring. "Where is the other of you?" he asked Wentworth.

The young man stopped sobbing, and seemed to think; suddenly his frame straightened, and he spoke in a voice that shook with anger: "Driscoll? Curse him! Driscoll——"

"Oh, it's Driscoll, is it?" said the inspector. "I thought as much. Where is he?"

"Curse him, he left me at the door. He brought me here, and told me I'd find my wife with the parson; and——"

"And a pretty job you've done," said the inspector, grimly. "If she dies, you'll swing for it, thank God."

Wentworth tore a piece of paper

from his pocket. "After you arrested Sinclair he sent Driscoll this." The inspector took the scrawl and read it.

"Now how'd he get that through my men?" He handed it to Barstow, who read it, and sank upon a chair. Only for a moment; then he rose and faced Wentworth.

"You cur!" he cried. "Oh, you cur! And you believed a felon's lie—against—I won't say against a priest of the Church of Christ, but against that woman, your wife——"

"No, no, my God, no!" sobbed the wretched man. "I had come straight from the arrest—she had seemed to be expecting that—Driscoll made me drunk— Oh, God!"

"Ay, he was drunk enough, poor wretch," said Barstow to me. "Read it, Lane."

The message was scrawled upon a bit

of memorandum-book, and was but a line:

"D.—The fool's wife has blown upon us. I was nabbed in the shop. Tell the fool he'll find the sailor parson at home, quietly making love to his wife. They let him go, which is more than she counted on. D. S."

"I went to the house, and found she had been there, and gone home with him. He made me drunk. Mary, Mary, forgive me—for God's sake hear me! It is Elmer!" The man had flung himself again on the floor, by her side.

"Ah, she will forgive you, but it's hanging just the same." The inspector seemed to find relief in saying this. Thank Heaven, the door opened and the surgeon came just then.

We left the room while he was making the examination, Barstow and I and the policeman. Wentworth pleaded piteously to stay, and the inspector allowed it; partly, I suppose, to keep his eye on him. He had carefully removed the pistol, and had him searched for other weapons, evidently fearing suicide.

When we got to the street, I saw that Barstow was walking like a drunken man.

"Come to the house! Come!" he said.

We had time to go there and return before the examination should be over. I told them briefly what had happened. Meantime, Barstow, seeing no one, went up to his private room. The Rev. Septimus Brand began to cry. I seemed to have got beyond that, somehow, but the little Russian boy was

crying, too. In a few minutes Barstow came down, dressed, for the first time I had seen him, in a priest's cloth. He never took it off again.

We went back, he and I and Stepan, to get the surgeon's report. Thank God, he gave us some faint hope! She might at least recover consciousness; he would not yet say that she might live. He had not ventured to probe for the bullet; he doubted if it could be reached; all depended on whether it had gone downward. Mrs. Wentworth was tall, and had been standing when her husband fired: that gave ground for hope. Meantime, it would not be wise to move her.

I arranged with him to procure all that was needful: two nurses, another surgeon. He could not tell when, if ever, she would recover consciousness: it might be the next morning; it

might be the day after. We could do nothing more.

Reluctantly I turned to go. Barstow would watch until the end. The inspector laid his hand upon Elmer Wentworth; the carriage was still below. "Come!" said he. Then I heard the cry of a lost soul.

Even the inspector drew back; and Barstow sprang up, his face working silently. If such appeals are at the judgment gate, God must be merciful. Leave her? Never would he leave her on earth, Wentworth said. His terror of the parting gave him superhuman strength; he shook off the burly policeman like a terrier. Hang him? Oh, yes, they might hang him; he would plead guilty; he would go himself when she died— go when— They might handcuff him in the room, leave a force there. "In the name of Christ"—

his voice suddenly dropped, in his last appeal, not to me, not to the inspector, but to Barstow, the priest he had wronged — "she might come to. I must speak to her—my Mary, Mary!" He was in tears, and we bowed our heads. "I must make my Mary hear me once more, only once more." He fell at the foot of the bed where she lay. "Mary, hear me! Oh, no, no, I will be quiet; I will be still," he whispered, as the surgeon hushed him, drawing him away. On his knees he moved to Barstow. "She might come to; she might miss me; she might one moment be well enough to hear me. In the name of Christ, you minister, I pray you make him not make me go!"

Then there was a silence; he seemed to faint; we heard the sobbing of the little Russian boy. And the white,

sweet face of the dying woman looked mutely at us.

Barstow stepped forward, book in hand. "As I am a minister of God, I guarantee him to you," he uttered hoarsely.

"And as attorney for the Commonwealth, I will vouch for you," said I.

"It didn't need you, sir," faltered the inspector. "I'll take the risk myself. MacCann!"—this gruffly to the soft-hearted Irishman. "Don't stand there blubbering! Get yourself in some room over the way, and watch for Driscoll!"

Then the inspector and I drove home.

VII

MRS. WENTWORTH did not become conscious that night nor the next day. The nurse and a young surgeon were always present; her husband never left her bedside, hardly even took his eyes off her face. He would neither eat nor sleep. Even the little Russian boy could not be kept from the door. But as for the Driscoll man, he never appeared; the policeman kept his watch in vain. Some account of the shooting had necessarily got into the papers, and he doubtless thought it wise to leave the State. The devil had done his work. Sinclair was duly sentenced; neither of the pair ever darkened the Wentworths' way again.

Barstow called a dozen times a day.

Of all men, he now alone had any influence over Wentworth. It was through his argument that Wentworth was persuaded to take food. It seemed as if the husband sought in any littlest way to mark his recovery from his insane suspicion of the woman who had linked her life to his.

It was not for the next world that he cared, but for this. Barstow, on his religious side, still made no appeal. It was the one word from the wife, living, that he wanted. Barstow saw it, and, as a man, he sympathized. I myself had some doubts whether Mrs. Wentworth would know that it was her husband who had shot her; if so, would it not, after all, be better she should not regain her consciousness, if death came? I said as much to Barstow; but he shook his head. Wentworth would never believe that she did not

know, he said. Of course, from the priest's point of view, she would know; but Barstow insisted it was not from this. Wentworth would have bartered immortality for one more mortal moment with her; and it was strange to find the priest sympathizing.

Morning, afternoon, and night I went there—three times a day—seven calls in all. Her condition remained much the same, only with failing pulse. But her husband's life seemed to be burning away, from the fire in his eyes. He sat mute while I was there; though Barstow said he sometimes spoke to him in private, and nothing would prevent him, when alone, from calling softly to his wife by name. After all, perhaps it did no harm.

After all, perhaps it did no harm; for at the eighth visit I was stopped by

Stepan, radiant at the door. It was Easter morning.

"She is living!" he said. "Christ is risen."

The Russian Easter salutation came second in his mind, but he said it (out of habit of hearing, or because his own faith lacked such a phrase) though a Jew. I remembered, and replied—

"Christ is risen."

"You cannot see her to-day," said the boy. "Nobody can see her to-day but the doctor and *him*."

"Him," I knew, meant the husband. "Does the doctor say she will get well?" I asked.

"Get well? Why, sure." Then, as if the doubt first struck him, he began to sob. "You—do—not think—she will not get well—now?"

I comforted him as best I could. I told him there was every hope. But

in the evening, when I went back, I was told that she had asked to see me. I was surprised, for even Barstow had not yet seen her; only, I was told by the surgeon, he and the nurse and her husband. It was her husband who had seen the first tremor of the eyelid; and after a moment, to make sure that all was really well, the doctor had taken even the nurse away, and left them together. It had done no harm; he had been allowed to talk to her for moments at intervals through the day, and each time she had seemed rather the stronger for it. There was hope of her recovery.

"Much?" I said.

"Some," he answered. But he had not dared probe for the bullet.

I went upstairs. The husband met me at the door. "She wants to see you alone," he said. A great peace

was in his face. He went away willingly. It was evident that he had told her.

But when I saw her face, I knew that he had told her more than this, that he had sought to kill her: he had told her that he loved her; once again had he told it to her, in such a way that she believed. Never had I seen her look so happy. By heavens, I have never seen such happiness in any woman's face! I am a bachelor; but I should make a good husband, for I would confess my love after marriage. I believe that Mrs. Wentworth would have gone through it again, for the winning of her husband back to herself. For this was what she wanted to say to me: that he loved her (she did not even put in "now"); that he was wholly hers; that he fired the shot in a moment of insanity. Now he was himself again—forever. And hers—

now really hers. (And indeed I saw that this might well be true; it was she that had won him now, not the mere instinct of a young man's courtship.) Would they prosecute him? She asked this suddenly.

The climax was unexpected. I stammered a little. "No—why no—at least, if you get well—or rather—it was only assault, not such a serious offence—doubtless he was insane—I will do what I can——"

"And if I die?"

"Oh, well — then, of course, it might be murder—that is, homicide—if you die within the year—from the effects of the shot—but you must not think of that——"

("By heaven," said Barstow, when I told him this, that night, "I believe she would like to die, while he loves her so.")

No, she must not think of that. She would live, she answered. Of course she would live.

"Elmer!"

She called her husband back. A faint voice it was, but he heard. I saw him bend over her, and I came away.

VIII

FOR some days she got better; at least, she seemed to lose no ground. Only, that one day the doctors sought to probe; with rather alarming results, so they gave it up. Still, they offered us every hope. She had something like a fainting spell after the attempt, but the next day was better again. It was on that day she asked for Stepan. The little Russian boy was allowed to see her. Otherwise only Barstow; she had not asked again for me. My good friend the inspector had withdrawn all his police from their house and from the house opposite; even the cynical official knew that Wentworth was ready to appear when wanted.

But on the day after Stepan saw her

she sent for me again. Barstow told me that she had been particularly calm that day; he was full of confidence; she had even persuaded her husband to go for a short walk. So it happened that when I went in we were alone again; at least, only the nurse was there, who retired, tactfully, just out of hearing.

Mrs. Wentworth's first words were accompanied with a smile. "You see, Mr. Lane, I am getting well."

I could not have said truthfully that she looked to me stronger; but I said I was sure of it.

"It is a long time, a year and a day, though. You said a year and a day, did you not?"

It was curious, her harping on this. "Oh, but you will get well long before that."

"If I don't, though—oh, what would they do—to Elmer, I mean?"

I felt in my soul that they would hang him ; but I said, "Oh, you must not think of that."

"Promise me—Mr. Lane, you have the power—promise me they shall not prosecute my Elmer for what he did while crazy. Oh, promise me——"

I could not quite do that, but I begged her not to think of such things. I assured her I would do what I could. I told her that of course his insanity would be a defence. I said a thousand things ; I hardly now remember what, only that I closed by again begging her not to let her mind run on such unlikely evils. Yet I looked at her, and saw that I had failed to carry conviction to her mind.

"You know he never intended to kill me. It was a sudden passion of jealousy, when he saw, as the poor crazy boy thought, the words of those

terrible men come true. I must tell you; they had worked on him before for this; they had been working on his mind a long time—ever since that first night Mr. Barstow had interfered with them. And" (this was in a very low tone) "he really loved me all the time. He always carried the pistol with him; it was one he used to have in the bank. It just came into his hand at the wrong moment; it was a sudden impulse; surely that is not really—murder?"

How could I tell her that it was—that the "malice premeditated" might begin actually upon the stairs; of the legal effect of his going home, with the revolver loaded, after seeing Sinclair's note? I was silent. She looked at me a few moments beseechingly; then her eyes fell.

"At least, it could not be murder if I lived a year and a day. And it would

not be murder if I died from something else?"

"Why, no," I said. "But you will live, Mrs. Wentworth; the doctors say so."

She looked at me again, intently.

"You are sure it would not be murder if I died from something else?" Then, as I nodded, puzzled, she hurried on: "Thank you very much. I trust in you. I trust in all you say. Remember. And, whatever happens, you will help him—be his lawyer, if you can? Thank you. I am rather tired now."

Still I only feared that I had talked too long, and I got up to go. Just as I was at the door she called again, "Remember!"

Naturally, I turned round to look at her, my hand upon the knob. I saw her with a pistol at her breast, and as I sprang forward she fired. Her head fell back upon the pillow. I was too late.

IX

THE nurse rushed in, and the doctor. I saw them lift her head; I saw them settle it upon the pillow, white amid the beautiful brown hair. I saw Barstow come, and Brand, and little Stepan. When the boy saw her, he gave a great cry; all the others were silent. It seemed that all the world came in, while I sat dazed. But last of all her husband came, and they drew aside. He knelt, and buried his face.

"Oh, why did she do it—she was going to get well—why did she do it—was she not, doctor?" It was Barstow who spoke, in low tones. We now were standing in a group at the other end of the room. The doctor was very pale, and hesitated. A light burst upon me.

"Doctor, did you tell *her* she would get well?" said I.

The beads of sweat stood upon his forehead. "I told her — this morning — she could not live another day."

"How did she get the revolver?" It was the inspector's voice. I turned, and saw that he had entered with the two policemen. It was all so quick; yet perhaps they had been watching all the time. There was a sob from Stepan; the little Russian boy was lying at her feet.

"I got it. She made me get it. I would do it again for her." So Stepan spoke. Again there was a long silence. Her white face was toward me, where I stood; her husband was sobbing, his face upon her hand.

"Come," said the inspector of police, touching him.

"After the funeral—oh, after the funeral!" cried Barstow, impetuously.

Wentworth himself was unresisting. Her hand in his, his dead wife seemed to look at me. Upon her lips I still saw the word "remember."

"Not then, nor now," I said. "Inspector, you may go. It is no longer murder; his bullet did not kill her."

They all looked at me. "I told her so, God help me. It is the law. It was a suicide. For the Commonwealth, inspector, I discharge you from this case."

"I take your word, sir. But there is still the assault."

"That is bailable. I will attend to the indictment. These gentlemen will be sureties."

They were more than ready to go. My work was done. I sank upon a chair. But Barstow, in a clear, low voice, began a prayer. We knelt by

the bedside of the dead woman with the husband whose life she had saved at peril of her soul.

In two days we were all at a quiet graveyard in the hills. Even the inspector was there, and Dempsey—Shiner Dempsey—had sent a wreath. Coming back in the train, Wentworth sat with Stepan; Barstow (who had decided to leave us for a Church brotherhood in New York) was talking to Brand; the inspector came and spoke to me: "You are sure about your law?"

"There is a California case—People against Lewis—that quite settles it."

"I hope you won't press the other indictment." I looked at him, surprised. "He has been punished more than we can do. And she died for that."

. . . . . .

What do you think he will do?" said I to Barstow, pointing to Wentworth.

"I do not know. He has had a good woman live for him—and die for him. He has had his chance."